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MODERN HISTORY

The last of the Virginians

Hugh Brogan

LARRY I. BLAND and SHARON R. RITENOUR (Editors)

The Papers of George Catlett Marshall: Volume 1, The Soldierly Spirit, December 1880-June 1939 742pp. Johns Hopkins University Press. £21. 0 8018 25520 0

April 23, 1939 was one of Franklin Roosevelt's best days. It was then that he informed Brigadier-General George Marshall that he was to be the next Army Chief of Staff. No doubt Marshall's warrior namesake, the saint whose feast-day it was, had a hand in the matter. For none of America's soldiers was to perform more valuable services during the coming war than Marshall; nor is it easy to think of any American citizen who surpassed his contribution - as emissary to China, as Secretary of State, as Secretary of Defence - in the years after 1945. The publication of his selected papers, beginning with the present volume (there are to be five others) is therefore an important, even a necessary, event. All concerned are to be congratulated.

I was once earnestly advised, by a most distinguished historian of war, not lightly to use words like "great" or "genius" in connection with generals (I think we were discussing Robert E. Lee at the time); but no one, I suppose, would deny that Marshall was an immensely capable commander; and there can be equally little doubt that, professional attributes aside, he was a great man. His character may, indeed, in years to come, prove to be his most valuable legacy to his countrymen. It was as impressive as that of other George's; as Washington's, Marshall, indeed, a very distant relation of the great Chief Justice of that name (characteristically, he deprecated his father's insistence on the kinship: "a kind of poor business. It was time for somebody to swim for the family again") may be called the last of the Virginians: even though he was born in western Pennsylvania, and had a Pittsburgh accent. For not only did he attend the Virginia Military Institute, like the great men of the Common-wealth he gave unflinching, unwearying service to his country and his profession all his life; accepted the blows of fate with stoic courage; was unfailingly upright and considerate in all his dealings; and exacted dutiful performance as rigorously from others as from himself.

His attitudes and opinions on almost all matters would, if summarized, sound conventional; but he did not hold them in a conventional way. For he was sharply intelligent, and every view he expressed, at any rate on paper, was based on deep and accurate reflection. He was as scrupulously truthful as the Washington of legend, refusing to write his memoirs on the grounds that only the truth would serve; and would wound too many people; and had a much better temper, ably, at his first meeting with General Pershing. Young Captain Marshall thought the commander-in-chief had been unjust to Marshall's superior officers, and said so to his face, loud and clear. He was intensely ambitious, but schooled himself to wait patiently for advancement, never pushing forward. Above all, perhaps, he knew how to turn disappointments to advantage, and made whatever happened to him the means of improving his military skills. He was indeed such a happy warrior as every man at arms should wish to be. Morally, he makes MacArthur, Eisenhower and Patton seem pygmies.

Marshall has been fortunate in his official biographer, Forrest Pogue; but Pogue's first volume is far shorter than the more than 700 small-print pages of the one now under review. This added length would not necessarily make the new book welcome. Marshall was not much of a writer, though years of producing official documents - letters, reports, speeches, memos - which had to be accurate and comprehensible, gave him in the end a straightforward fluency that almost amounted to a style. He had an interesting life. But more than that was needed to warrant his editors' labours. Larry I. Bland and Sharon R. Ritenour might have justified themselves by picking out of the Marshall archive those documents which throw light on American army life in the first forty years of our century, and only incidentally reveal Marshall. Very wisely they have rejected this course and instead produced what amounts to a documentary biography. All the items printed (they are unnumbered, so I can only guess that there are about 500 of them) throw light on Marshall's mind, or personality, or career. Not all the documents are from the general's pen, or his typewriter; there is, for example, a touching letter from his second wife to President Roosevelt thanking him for

appointing her husband Chief of Staff; but most of them are, and almost every single one is interesting. My only complaint is that there are not quite enough of them. Marshall wrote very little for publication at any time, but that makes the few articles which he contributed to army journals in his youth all the more interesting: even so single-hearted a character must have shown the effects of the law by which we are not quite the same in words meant for print as in words for private consumption; however meagre, the articles should have appeared here, especially as they do not seem to have been reprinted anywhere else.

Volume One shows the man as I have described him. Its main theme, a fascinating one, is his development as a thorough professional, both in terms of his personal training and in his views of modern warfare and the American army's mission. He was early spotted as having all the attributes of an ideal staff officer: he was only a lieutenant in 1914, when it was first predicted that he would be Chief of Staff. But the ideal staff officer is not what many people thoughtlessly suppose. Marshall hated desk jobs. He was always yearning for the direct command of troops and said repeatedly that he was a country boy, unfit for life in towns. He became

it out. He was not always, or perhaps often, successful. The editors drily point out that in spite of his efforts, as Deputy Chief of Staff, to do something about the army's baroque tables of organization, they were as bad as ever two years later: "In 1941, the Headquarters, Field Army ... had a twenty-three column, seventy-eight row table with seventeen lettered footnotes for slightly less than seven hundred men."

But Marshall's struggle well illustrates his order of priorities, as does the speech he gave in 1939 to the National Rifle Association (which was apparently a useful organization in those days) when he came as near as he ever did to eloquence:

Once the field of action has been reached and the employment completed, the infantry soldier becomes an isolated individualist, with all the frailties of the individual magnified a thousandfold. Only a corporal remains nearby to back him up, upon whom he can depend for reassurance. He lacks a physical rallying point - no ship, no heavy gun, no fortification, nothing but a few scattered buddies. He is a young fellow, depressed by a heavy physical burden on his back, exhausted by long marches of concentration and deployment, and lack of food, and he is virtually alone under the terrific pounding of hostile fires of every character. Of himself, by himself, he can apparently do very little, though collectively he can win the war.

It is easy to infer, from these sentences, what insights Marshall had gathered from the First World War, and much of this volume shows him arguing for them against all comers. There was one famous occasion in 1938 in the White House when FDR held forth enthusiastically on the supremacy of aircraft in modern warfare and the desirability of sacrificing all other considerations to the necessity of having thousands of the things as rapidly as possible. Everyone agreed except the Junior Brigadier-General sitting on a remote sofa. The President turned to him: "Don't you think so, George?" (Marshall did not appreciate this familiarity, and Roosevelt never called him "George" again). "Mr. President, I am sorry, but I don't agree with that at all," Roosevelt, to his eternal credit, was most favourably impressed.

But it was not only the war in France which deepened Marshall's under-



Between the summers of 1924 and 1927 Lieutenant Colonel George C. Marshall, Jr. served in the "United States Army Forces in China" based at Tientsin to protect American lives and property against anti-foreign activities of the Boxer Rebellion kind. Here he is photographed on hunting with Captain Frank B. Hayne (left) at the seashore training camp site of Nan Ta Su: reproduced from the book reviewed here.

For the rest, this is a volume without serious blemish. There ought to have been a proper list of illustrations; I have my doubts of the index (for example, why is there only one entry under "Gettysburg map", something that Marshall was always complaining about?); and I see no point in reproducing mere slips of the typewriter (Marshall's rather endearing misspellings are another matter). Otherwise the editing is notably helpful and unobtrusive. The book is pleasant to look at and handle as well as to read. And the publishers have brought it out at a price which, as things go nowadays, must be reckoned very tolerable. I look forward eagerly to Volume Two.

So wherever he went he tried to stamp

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standing of his profession. What at times seemed like the long disaster of his post-1918 career proved in the end at least as valuable. Robbed by the Armistice of confirmation in his temporary rank of full colonel, he reverted to a captain; did not become a colonel again until 1933, nor a general until 1936, by which time he was fifty-six. The prestige and pay of regular army officers in the United States were low. Military needs and military doctrine were strictly subordinated to the views of a tight-fisted, isolationist, occasionally pacifist Congress. Worst of all, even a man as notably brilliant as Marshall had to take what he was offered in the way of postings. They did not seem to lead anywhere: and it was an especially bitter blow in 1933 to be sent off to be senior instructor to the Illinois National Guard, for it seemed like a professional dead end. At least one of the moves was prompted by compassion for Marshall. When his first wife died suddenly in 1927 he was hurriedly transferred to the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and then to a Washington which had become intolerable to him as the place of his loss. But most of them were made with reference to the Army's convenience, not Marshall's; and a lesser man might in the end have given up hope and destroyed himself by sulking. Even Marshall was notably gloomy during his first few months in Illinois.

But he had an instinct to turn his hand to the work available, and soon realized that he had a wonderful opportunity. Geography and politics alike dictated that the United States could not have a large regular army, or a peacetime conscript force, like those of the nations it was most likely to fight. The chief function of the tiny body of regulars must be to act as a cadre in the rapid recruitment, training and deployment of a vast citizen army after the outbreak of war. Yet such a process could not begin to show results until a year after the outbreak of hostilities, and meantime the only military force which could stand between America and disaster would be the National Guard (the equivalent of the British Territorial Army). So the training of the National Guard was a professional task of the utmost importance. Not only would it give the regulars practice in an art they would desperately need when war came (and Marshall never doubted that it would come); not only would it strengthen America's defenses; but it would create the nucleus of a vast citizen army which in the end would be the only possible instrument of victory. So well did Marshall understand this that not only was his passion for teaching brought fully into play, but he also began to show himself adept at cultivating important civilians. This too (the sort of exercise which many regulars found demeaning) was a necessary art for the would-be leader of citizens.

Marshall saw and seized a similar opportunity when working in the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933 and again between 1936 and 1938. One of the most pressing problems confronting the New Deal at its winning was the restless horde of unemployed young men who were drifting hopelessly and aimlessly about the country. One of Franklin Roosevelt's happiest inspirations was to recruit them into the CCC where, in exchange for their subsistence and a small wage, they could be set to work on reforestation and other tasks of land reclamation. The US government was so small and uneconomic that only the army, of all its agencies, possessed the skills to organize such a project. So to the normal work of the army corps was added the responsibility of supervising the camps where the boys lived and worked. It was a task which suited Marshall perfectly, and he performed it magnificently: never in his entire career can he have received a more touching tribute than the cartoon published in the local CCC journal when he left

Vancouver. The picture shows two CCC men waving goodbye as they go down a path leading "To A Job In Industry" (clearly postscripted), each carrying a letter of commendation from General Marshall; while he, going in the opposite direction, carries a letter of commendation from his former charges: "We know you always placed our welfare first. Signed: Enrollees of Vancouver CCC District." Deep beneath the general's chilly exterior was a very kind heart, particularly tender to young men, perhaps because he had no sons of his own; the boys of the CCC had detected it; but much more important, he and they learned from each other how to get along. The adolescents of the CCC were to be the men of the Pacific and Normandy; it was just as well that their supreme commander had acquired so much skill in handling them.

Marshall remarked that "I found the CCC the most instructive service I have ever had, and the most interesting." This impact on the enrollees is amusingly indicated in a letter about ROTC (another institution for training citizens of which he soon discovered the value): "In the CCC we are barred from every form of military instruction and have to maintain discipline by what you might call remote control... when an eighteen year old, undeveloped lad can sit on the small of his back, with his feet on the table, during the inspection of that particular room by a general commanding the district, you can see how far we have to go to avoid antagonizing a large number of people. I might say, very privately, that they didn't sit on the small of their back around me - but the regulations were quite another affair."

Marshall, in short, during the inter-war years, immeasurably strengthened his sense of what an American army must be, and how it was to be brought into being. But he did not neglect the other aspects of the military art. The last two hundred pages or so of this book show him, as head of the War Plans Division, and then as Deputy Chief of Staff, starting to grapple with the endless problems of high command. The allocation of limited resources is his chief preoccupation, but he handles it in a way that shows he has not allowed his grasp of strategy and tactics to rust since his days with Pershing. He begins to place his talented friends and pupils, the "Marshall men", where they can do most good. It is plain that in 1939 the US Army was in safe hands. How much those hands were to be needed in later years the next volume of the Marshall Papers will no doubt show abundantly.

Divisional differences

John Terraine

JOHN KEEGAN
Six Armies in Normandy
365pp. Cape, £8.95,
0 224 01541 9.

It is an ingenious idea of John Keegan's to tell the story of the D-Day landings in 1944, and the ensuing Battle of Normandy, phase by phase in terms of the nationalities which took part - the "six armies". If he had been too rigid about it, it would not have worked; but he has avoided that pitfall. It is a further ingenuity to approach the battle through types of experience, rather than, say, geography (eg beach by beach, sector by sector) or strategy ("the holding fight", "the buildup", "the Brittany diversion", etc), without ever pretending that any one nation had the monopoly of any one sort of warfare, and without losing sight of chronology.

So he begins with the airborne landings, the first Allied impact upon Hitler's "Fortress Europe", and these he describes through the experience of the two American divisions involved, the 82nd ("All American") and 101st ("Screaming Eagles"). The business of holding on to the fortified beaches in assault craft, and rushing them for a foothold, is presented from a Canadian viewpoint (with all the heavy overtones of the D-Day tragedy of August 1942). The British divisions were, of course, meeting the same problems with much the same emotions, while, away on Omaha Beach the US V Corps seemed for a time to face the prospect of a D-Day of its own.

Hands across the sea

Paul Kennedy

DAVID REYNOLDS

The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Co-operation
397pp. Europa, £20.
0905118685

The half-decade covered by this book witnessed some of the most important political and military events of the present century: the Nazi acquisition of Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland, the seizure of France, Operation Barbarossa, Pearl Harbor. But these years were also witness to the replacement of Great Britain by the United States, a process which was no less significant because it lacked the sudden and spectacular features of a great battle.

Just how to describe the Anglo-American relationship, particularly during this watershed period when one partner edged past the other to become leader of the "free world", offers a severe test to the historian's talents. There are some who take the easy way out by focusing almost exclusively upon the actions of national leaders, as personifications and chief executives of the entire state. Just as, say, Anglo-American relations in the late nineteenth century have been presented in terms of an interaction between Bismarck and Salisbury, may not Anglo-American relations at this particular point in the twentieth century be seen as an interaction between Roosevelt and Churchill - or, for that matter, Reagan and Thatcher?

Yet, as soon as one makes that contemporary analogy, the inadequacy of the "national leader" approach becomes obvious. The British Prime Minister and the American President are at the apex of their respective political systems and, in consequence, are vital figures in the decision-making process; but they are neither all-important nor absolute. In most of their policy decisions they have been influenced by the views of powerful cabinet colleagues, by the moves of political rivals, by pressures in Congress and Parliament, by economic lobbies, and by the advice tendered (often along contradictory lines) by various parts of the bureaucracy such as the Chiefs of Staff or the Treasury.

This domestic context may, moreover, be altering from one half-year to the next because of electoral or trade-cycle trends, thus turning the art of governing into a permanent juggling act. Since the external context is also frequently changing - due to international crises, unforeseen events, and so on - the historian who strives to outline the relationship between two nations over a period of time often feels that nothing is still, and that no general remark is valid for more than a fleeting moment. The "seamless web" of history is, alas, a moving seamless web.

It says much for David Reynolds's *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance* that it succeeds brilliantly in capturing for the reader all of this movement, at all the different levels of interaction. And it succeeds because the author realises that, in describing complex matters, platitudes are out. Take, for example, all the rhetoric about the cultural and ideological unity of the "English-speaking peoples". Dr Reynolds wisely does not dismiss such assertions as mere verbiage, for the book is on both sides of the Atlantic, and individuals like Latham and (above all) Churchill, believed in that unity as of historical significance. But what he does do is to show that these cultural and ideological aspects often meant different things on each side of the Atlantic: that there were many (non-) WASPs in the US or ultra-imperialist Britons who did not subscribe to this pan-Anglo-Saxonism; and that, in any case, such considerations have to be fitted into the strikingly different political systems which operated in these two countries. To refer easily to the Anglo-American cultural link on its own is, therefore, misleading.

It is with similar care, sophistication and nuance of language that Reynolds approaches the issue of Anglo-American economic relations, that legacy of post-1919 misunderstandings and rivalries without which the hard bargaining over Lend-Lease simply cannot be understood. Here again, commercial competition and the controversy over Imperial Preference cannot be seen in isolation: they related to American distaste for colonialism and regional blocs, the British distrust of transatlantic cartels and business lobbies, and the way in which the underlying shifts in global production affected the arena of

power-politics. American aid to Britain would always have strings attached, therefore; and while Washington's intention was to tie the strings tight, Whitehall's was to keep them loose.

For all of its honest and cool dissection of the factors which tended to drive Britain and the US apart, this book's chief concern is to trace how, under the compelling circumstances of external events and the rising dangers to both of them in Europe and in the Far East, there slowly evolved a "common-law alliance". Since Britain was geographically closer to the Nazi threat, was drawn into war first, and was economically much weaker than the US, it always had fewer strong cards in its diplomatic poker-game with Roosevelt's administration - a very good reason for Neville Chamberlain, in the first place, European hostilities in 1939 did not destroy this poker-game; even in the darkest months, just after Dunkirk, the British were still bargaining with the Americans and had various things to offer. In addition, although Whitehall was becoming ever more bound to the US for military and economic aid, by that time most people in Washington would privately admit that they in turn were bound to the preservation of Great Britain, wars and all. Pearl Harbor, for all its implications, did not alter this basic relationship, which Reynolds neatly terms "competitive co-operation".

It is impossible, in offering a brief synopsis of the main themes of this book, to provide evidence of its other merits; but in its analysis of individual personalities, its stylistic skill, its clever chapter arrangement, and its impressive use of archival and published sources, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance* emerges as a distinguished and mature piece of work. Few, if any, of the multitude of other studies upon the complex Anglo-American relationship give one the same satisfying feeling that one has encountered a historian who is truly in command of his subject.

Volumes 9 and 10 of John Y. Simon's edition of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, covering the period July 1863 - May 1864, have recently been published (700pp and 618pp. Southern Illinois University Press, £30 each. 0 8093 0979 3 and 0 8093 0980 7).

BIOGRAPHY AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Battling against the Thing

J. F. C. Harrison

GEORGE SPATER

William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend
Two volumes
653pp Cambridge University Press,
£20 the set.
0 521 22216 8 and 0 521 24077 8

Eight years ago a reviewer in the *7LS* (January 18, 1974) speculated on the likelihood of a Cobbett revival. No such awakening has in fact materialized, and Cobbett remains of interest as a minor figure in English literature and an uncomfortable curiosity in the history of the English Left. Only E. P. Thompson, in his great *Making of the English Working Class*, has recognized the full significance of Cobbett and drawn upon him accordingly. While books on Blake and William Morris and the Chartist continue to tumble off the presses, Cobbett (who in his day reached out to audiences far beyond any other radical writer) seems not to have anything like the same appeal. Since most of us read history because we see it as related in some way to the world in which we live, the relatively modest interest in him must be due to a feeling of his remoteness. He belongs, apparently, to an age, and enunciates views, with which we have little in

and 30 million words (M. L. Pearl's *William Cobbett: A Bibliographical Account of his Life and Times*, 1953, mass of material). Second, a very great deal of Cobbett's writing is about himself. As George Spater truly observes, Cobbett had a "heroic-sized ego". Unless the reader warms to Cobbett's personality, this trait (which was present even on his death-bed) may become a sticking-point. "When I am asked what books a young man or young woman ought to read," wrote Cobbett, "I always answer: Let him or her read all the books that I have written."

There are of course several Cobbetts, and a biographer has to decide which one shall predominate. Is he to be the Tory-Radical, or "a kind of eccentric", or the Great Eccentric, or "a peasant declassé" (G. D. H. Cole)? Dr Spater, while aware of all these aspects, plumps for Cobbett as "The Poor Man's Friend", and this subtitle sets the tone for his splendid new biography. Spater, was for "the poor men of England". By the poor Cobbett meant the bulk of the population, who live wholly by the sweat of their brow". He was convinced that they were worse off

the patronage of the poor, at a time when they are depressed below the place which they have fortunately held in this country for a century." For Cobbett there was only one touchstone: the happiness of the common people. "If I am asked," he wrote in the *Political Register* in 1819, "whether I look upon such and such a nation to be in a state of prosperity; I ask, whether the labouring classes be out of their honest earnings, well fed and well clad." Cobbett was not concerned with economic growth and the national rush to riches. He wished England to be "what it formerly was: a less splendid and more happy land".

The main outlines of Cobbett's career are well known and were described by him in various places. Born at Farnham in Surrey (almost certainly in 1763, though he thought in 1766), the son of a small farmer and inn-keeper, he was, as he says, "bred at the plough-tail". He joined the army in 1784 and served for seven years on the American-Canadian border, rising rapidly from private to sergeant-major. On his discharge in 1791 he tried to bring charges of embezzlement against some of the officers in his regiment, but abandoned the attempt and fled to France. From there he went to America, where he lived for eight years (1792-1800), mostly in Philadelphia. Under the pseudonym, Peter Porcupine, he became a journalist and vigorous defender of Britain to a pro-French America. He returned to England in 1800, was welcomed as a supporter of the conservative cause, and in 1802 began publishing his *Political Register*. In 1806 he changed course and became a reformer, convinced that the government was corrupt and wasteful and he devoted the last thirty years of his life to fighting what is now called the Establishment but which Cobbett dubbed the System or the Thing. He was imprisoned for two years and fined £1,000 for writing against the flogging of militiamen; and in the post-war government repression he thought it prudent to flee to America, where he remained for two and a half years. After his return to England in 1819 he continued to champion the cause of reform, and the years 1821 to 1823 were the period of his greatest literary and political successes. He was returned as MP for Oldham in the reformed House of Commons in 1833, and died in 1835.

The main question posed by a new biography of Cobbett is to what extent it uses new material or presents a new interpretation. What does it add to existing studies by John W. Osborne, James Sambrook, P. W. Gaines and especially the pioneering *Life* by Cole, originally published in 1924? First, Spater's book is much fuller than any previous biography: 650 pages in two handsome volumes, with footnotes and fifty illustrations. It is based on a very thorough reading of Cobbett's letters and all his published works. Second, Spater has been able to use material not previously available. His exciting discovery of new letters in America and a notebook in the possession of descendants of Cobbett in England has been told elsewhere (*THES*, September 18, 1981). The result is that Spater's *Cobbett* contains more hard evidence than any work hitherto, and will be (to use the old cliché) the definitive work from now on.

Cobbett's career is tantalizingly obscure at certain critical points. Although (or perhaps because) his writings are very full of himself, the Cobbett he projected was partly a myth, in which he himself believed. All the time he was writing, he was to some extent, and often unconsciously, a smoke-screen, designed to hide as much as it reveals. One of the tasks of the historian is to probe beneath this surface account to the realities which the author ignored or tried to hide. An early example of this in Cobbett's case occurred in 1792. During his last year in the army he collected evidence about dishonesty among the officers of his regiment; and after his discharge he brought charges of corruption against them. A court martial was convened for March 24, 1792, at the Horse Guards. The defendants, witnesses and documents in the case were all present; but the prosecutor, Cobbett,



"Transatlantic luxury", an English print (reproduced in the book reviewed here) which depicts Cobbett in the company of animal acquaintances outside his Long Island house while he writes home to absent human friends. Shortly after his arrival in America he wrote to Thomas Jefferson: "Ambitious to become the citizen of a free State, I have left my native country, England, for America: I bring with me youth, a small family, a few useful literary talents and that is all."

who has not changed his opinion of men as well as of things?" Undoubtedly the hardest blow that Cobbett had to suffer was his trial and imprisonment in 1810. The enormous influence of the *Political Register* in its continuous attacks on the government made it highly likely that an attempt would be made to silence him, and it was not difficult to find an article in the *Register* which could be made the basis for a charge of criminal libel. The article so selected was a sarcastic and vitriolic comment on the flogging by German mercenaries of five local militiamen at Ely. The trial was before "that villainous judge", Chief Justice Ellenborough, and one of the government's special (packed) juries. Cobbett feared the worst, and in addition did himself no good by attempting to defend himself instead of employing a lawyer. Having got him into their clutches, the government was determined to break him and then keep him under their thumb. He was found guilty and sentenced to two years' imprisonment in Newgate and fined £1,000. On release from prison he was to enter into a recognizance to keep the peace for seven years, under bond in the amount of £3,000, together with two sureties in the amount of £1,000 each (ie, an additional fine of £5,000 if he "misbehaved" during the next seven years).

For Cobbett this spell financial ruin. He had a wife, six children, and numerous other dependants to support. Everything he owned was either invested in his farm at Botley or in his publishing house in London, and both enterprises were run on borrowed money. In addition to the fine of £1,000, his living accommodation in Newgate had to be paid for privately if he was to avoid a common cell, and this cost him over £2,000. He had to dispose of part of his publishing ventures (notably the *Parliamentary Debates*, the *Parliamentary History*, and the *State Trials*), his debts remained unpaid, and he suffered an immediate loss of credit. When he came out of Newgate, he was in dire financial straits, from which he never completely recovered. So severe were these constraints that they may well have been one of the reasons why, five years later, Cobbett decided to escape to America - as well as to avoid the risk of another imprisonment following the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1817.

Newgate left an indelible mark on Cobbett. He never left London, and was most disliked about this on fellow chains exercising in the prison yard, and in winter he hated the fog, the smoke that obscured "the length of every street". It was all a far cry from his farm and the countryside he loved so dearly. Spater suggests that perhaps, and (tomorrow) receive proof of his long being a thief, you must continue, his image of himself. He was a proud to praise him. Where is the man, and he could never rid himself of

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The doctrine of consistency, as now in vogue, is the most absurd that ever was broached. It teaches that, if you once think well of any person or thing, you must always think well of that person or thing, whatever changes may take place either in them, or in the state of your information respecting them. For instance, if you praise a man today, and (tomorrow) receive proof of his long being a thief, you must continue, his image of himself. He was a proud to praise him. Where is the man, and he could never rid himself of



"The Good Soldier Cobbett. In 1809, when the Tory Government was under attack from the Poor Man's Friend, James Gillray, a supporter of the administration, was prompted to retaliate with the series of eight cartoons in which Cobbett's own account of his life was parodied. The caption to this engraving, which is reproduced in the book reviewed here, reads: 'As I shot up into a hobble-dehoy, I took to driving the Plow for the benefit of mankind, which was always my prime object; - hearing that the Church-Wardens were after me, I determined to become a Hero, and secretly quitting my agricultural pursuits, and Sukey Stubbs, - Volunteered as a Private-Soldier into the 51st Regiment, commanded by that tried Patriot and Marryre Lord Edw. Fitzgerald - and embarked for the Plantations.'

common: we can read him for fun but not for enlightenment. Cobbett does not fit easily, if at all, into the categories fashionable among English social historians today. His kind of radicalism - individualistic untheoretical, non-revolutionary and pre-industrial - has few sympathizers, some other movement. As early as 1893 he was pigeon-holed by Marx as "the creator of old English radicalism" - an antiquated modern Chartist.

There are also two formidable difficulties in reading (and still more in writing about) Cobbett. First, there is an enormous amount of his writings: at least three times that number of separate editions and issues. His *Political Register*, begun in 1804, ran to 1835. In all, his published works totalled something between 20

In 1807 and later then when he was born in 1766, and he wished to restore to the nation a better condition. This was not a hankering after a golden age in the past, but a simple comparison based on his own experience. "Well do I remember," he wrote, "when old men, common labourers, used to wear to church good broad-cloth coats which they had worn at their weddings." In those days "every poor man brewed a barrel of ale to be drunk at the lying-in of his wife, and another to be spent at the christening of the child". Such modest comforts, together with enough to eat, a fire to sit by, and a dry roof, were Cobbett's recipe for labouring happiness.

But he found that this goal was unattainable under the economic and political structure of his time, and he fought to realize his vision of what England should be like for labouring people. Almost alone he championed the agricultural labourers. As James Mill noted in 1808, "He has assumed

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the thought that he had been jailed like a common criminal for protesting against the brutal flogging of young boys in the militia who had dared to complain that they had not been paid what they were entitled to. For the remainder of his days Cobbett nursed a sense of grievance, and a bitterness entered his soul. His daughter Anne noticed how he changed during his imprisonment: before he entered Newgate, she wrote, "the black ox had not trod on his foot". Thereafter, comments Spater, he equated the personal injustice from which he had suffered with the injustices suffered by the whole class from which he came.

On some obscure points—such as the matter of Thomas Paine's bones—the new biography is unable to add much beyond what is already known; though, as always throughout the book, the meticulous documentation of details is invaluable. Cobbett, who had earlier detested Paine, later became an admirer of his views on paper money, and wished to make amends in some way. When he returned from America in 1819 he brought with him a coffin containing the remains, which he had exhumed at New Rochelle, intending to raise a monument in England worthy of the great services which he now considered Paine had rendered to mankind. But Cobbett received no support for this project; and no event in his life raised more laughter than Paine's bones, which remained in his possession to the time of his death. The mystery is what finally happened to them. We know that at the auction of Cobbett's effects in 1836 the auctioneer refused to offer for sale a box "found to contain human bones", wrapped up in separate papers, presumed to be those of Paine. Numerous legends about the history of the bones circulated thereafter. Spater records, "a commonly held belief among the descendants of Cobbett (1980) is that the bones were discreetly buried, sometime past, by one of their ancestors at an unknown location on property then owned by a member of the family".

One of the strengths of Spater's book is that it provides considerably more detail about Cobbett's domestic and non-political life than previous biographies. In particular, his relations with his wife and the family quarrel

during the last years of his life are explored in depth. Cobbett's wife, Nancy, was loving and dutiful, but she was more conservative and conventional than her husband, and disliked many of his radical friends, especially Henry Hunt. Disagreements within the family and Cobbett's overbearing and masterful ways did nothing to promote harmony. In 1827, when she was fifty-three years old, Nancy tried to commit suicide. From then until his death Cobbett became increasingly estranged from his family. Ironically, this was the background to his last great book, *Advice to Young Men* (1830), which, in heavily autobiographical form, portrayed the myth of the ideal married couple and their devoted children. This was in fact, as Spater shrewdly observes, "part of a larger myth that exalted everything in Cobbett's life, beginning with that perfect childhood in Farnham from which he had run away four times". Cobbett's entry into Parliament in 1833 only exacerbated the family tensions. By July 1833 he was clearly suffering from a serious mental and physical breakdown, and his quarrel with the family deepened. He lived alone at his Bolt Court office in London or at Normandy farm, Ash, in Surrey, which he rented from 1832. Only his oldest son, William, was allowed to visit him, and Cobbett died without being reconciled to his wife and other children. His funeral in Farnham on June 27, 1835, was attended by about 8,000 people: the obituaries dutifully and even eulogistically recorded his passing, but not one of them disputed the myth of his unusually happy family life.

Spater's *Cobbett* is everything that a historical biography should be, and the sort of book Cobbett would have approved of: a plain, workmanlike job, with no pretension. It records actually all that is known about Cobbett, and pursues extraneous issues only in so far as they are necessary to explain his behaviour and opinions. It is lucidly written, and is completely innocent of verbiage and jargon. Yet it does not overwhelm the reader with the implication that there is henceforth no more to be said about Cobbett. On the contrary, it is a scholarly tool which future historians will use when they seek to interpret or reassess the significance of "the poor man's friend".



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Mobilizing the movement

David Jones

JAMES EPSTEIN

The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement, 1832-1842
327pp. Croom Helm £14.95.
0 85664 922 8

It has been obvious for many years that Feargus O'Connor, one of the most important and extraordinary of all nineteenth-century politicians, deserves a proper biography. This volume cannot be regarded as the definitive study, for it ends in 1842 when the Chartist movement had been in existence for only four years. Even so, it is a major contribution to our appreciation of O'Connor and the movement which he served. Misunderstanding of the bluff Irishman is, of course, engrained in our history; William Lovett and R. G. Gammage had few good things to say about the Lion of Freedom and generations of caring but careless labour historians have done scant justice to the man.

The reasons for this unpopularity and indifference are many. O'Connor could be arrogant and brutal to colleagues, and, worse still, he had the knack of being right before and after every event. At times, as during the crises of 1839 and 1842, the sophisticated political advice that poured from his *Northern Star* looked suspiciously like a prescription for

inaction to angry colliers and weavers. And, just to rub it in, O'Connor constantly belaboured the working class with his sacrifices in their cause. For certain labour historians there is also the additional problem of his open distrust of too much theory and "isms"; this landowner-cum-lawyer was no proto-Marxist.

O'Connor had, however, two great advantages which set him apart from the other labour leaders of his generation. He had, as master of the platform and the press, a truly astonishing hold over the rank and file. James Epstein tells us, in one of the most valuable sections of the book, that it was the Irishman rather than Lovett or Hetherington who was responsible for building up a mass movement from the mid-1830s. By the late spring of 1838, when the Charter was published, he had established scores of universal suffrage clubs and the most famous radical newspaper of the nineteenth century. O'Connor also did more than anyone else to keep the movement alive and, despite some formidable obstacles, managed to impose a kind of unity on a disparate set of causes. By 1842, when Chartism was at its height, policy and action were coordinated by the National Charter Association, the first independent working-class political party in the world. Dr Epstein is one of the first historians to grasp the significance of the NCA; it reflected the true spirit of Chartism, which was above local politics and reliance on the goodwill of middle-class friends. Throughout this volume the author keeps us aware of

the prodigious efforts made by O'Connor on behalf of the NCA and the wider movement. Unfortunately, the Land Plan, his most famous design to strengthen and sustain the political movement, falls outside the scope of the book.

There is much to admire in the style, content and analysis of this biography. Epstein has distilled a fascinating story from contemporary myths and the tradition of Edward Thompson and Iorwerth Prothero, has given meaning to the words and actions of thousands of ordinary men and women. He rightly stresses the class-consciousness of these people and their artisan perspectives, and finds in their relationship with O'Connor no evidence of Tory radicalism. He criticized O'Connor from time to time and, after 1842, doubts increased about the direction in which he was leading the movement. Epstein gives a brilliant account of the central problem of physical force; O'Connor sought confrontation with the government but drew his followers back from the brink of revolution. The actual things were the responsibility of secondary leaders, frustrated rank and file and indifferent rulers.

Apart from a few errors in the typesetting, the presentation of the book is admirable, and the footnotes are excellent. My only regret is that Dr Epstein has not promised a second volume. As it is, he has set in motion a major reappraisal of the greatest popular movement in modern British history.

"Sheffield outrages" — "rattening", the stealing of non-union grinders' driving-belts or tools and even the use of homemade bombs down the chimneys of bigdiggers — provoked a royal commission which only rescued the trade unions from obloquy by setting out to prove that Sheffield was a repudiated exception. Really large factories — for motor manufacture rather than steel pens and wood-screws — only came to Birmingham in the twentieth century and their effects are largely outside the scope of the book.

At a deeper level, however, Smith is right to insist on the profound differences between social relations in the two cities, at least in his chosen period. Despite their common origin in a pre-industrial world of domestic outwork and the small workshops of "little masters", the two communities developed along different lines. Sheffield, towards "fission and conflict", Birmingham towards "fusion and compromise". The reasons for this, he argues, lie in their pre-industrial social structure and their relations to the surrounding rural society in which they were embedded. Sheffield until the great steelworks arrived was a collection of small anarchic neighbourhoods full of heedy but aggressively independent knife-grinders and other artisans in the cutlery and tool-making trades. The town's élite were small domestic capitalists, shopkeepers, lawyers and doctors at more than ten's length from the great noble landholders of the Duke of Devonshire, the Duke of Norfolk, and Wharfedale, who owned and dominated the town and its surrounding mines and farms. At the same time the little masters were fearful and warily respectful of the independent artisans who proudly and fiercely ran their own affairs through the trade societies which controlled the labour market and often overawed the bench and other organs of authority with the fear of riot or violence. Yet when the great steel mill, John Brown, and government contracts, they leapt straight on to a national plane of connection, hobnobbing with the local nobility, and importing thousands of semi-skilled and unskilled labourers to undermine and overwhelm the small-scale neighbourhood communities of the old artisans, intravenous the artisans set out to seize political control of the town, and confrontation and conflict ensued.

If anything, it was more a difference in timing. Mass production of steel came in the 1850s, when Sheffield was "the shock-city of the age". The more heterogeneous pre-industrial community, with many more trades and ladders from the workshop to the small factory and counting-house, evolved into a more integrated and harmonious hierarchy with an élite which, in the absence of giant landlords, took the lead in civic pride and responsible municipal reform. Rather than throw in their lot with the national, aristocratic Anglican establishment the mainly Dissenting Birmingham élite, led by men like G. F. Muntz and Joseph Chamberlain, set out to challenge it and impose principles of enterprise, merit and social reform which they had pioneered in Birmingham upon the nation. Thus Birmingham in its turn became "the shock city of the age", not in the sense of provoking horror and disgust but of forcing its aggressive code of capitalist collectivism upon first the Liberal and then the Unionist national government. "In this way," Smith writes, "Birmingham and its surrounding area achieved the adaptation of traditional values to urban and industrial life" and transmitted them to the country at large.

He pursues this contrast between the two cities through the "three institutional orders" of former education, industrial relations and local government very persuasively and with many telling allusions to religion, charitable provision, the professions and much else. Whether at the finish his book justifies its title, whether it does indeed deal with class formation in English society as distinct from the ebb and flow of class relations in two not necessarily typical English cities, one may still doubt, but it is none the less a refreshing and illuminating study of the complexities of modern urban society and their refusal to be reduced to a few pseudo-scientific laws of inexorable development.

The Industrial Archaeology of North-West England, by Owen Ashmole (241pp. Manchester University Press, £9.50. 0 7190 0820 4) contains a gazetteer, with illustrations and maps, of sites of interest in Cheshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Lancashire. It serves as both a history and a guide to, eg, the cotton-spinning mills of Oldham, the silk and weavers' garrets in Congleton and Macclesfield, the docks and warehouses of Liverpool and Manchester, the weaving sheds of Burnley, Nelson and Colne, and the development of cotton mills in Stockport and Preston.

FICTION

V.S. PRITCHETT

Collected Stories
320pp. Chatto & Windus. £12.50.
0 7011 39048

If anywhere there lurks any doubt that V.S. Pritchett should carry off the palm as the best living English short story writer, this pleasingly fat volume of his stories will surely rout the warriors. It is, alas, not quite the full collection that its title suggests, so that in that respect, though only in that one, V.S. Pritchett still lags behind his closest short-story rival of his own time, the late Elizabeth Bowen — who was granted a complete *Collected Stories* in 1980. But that caveat aside, here, rewarding for old and new readers alike, is an enticing trove of around fifty years' worth of the master's mature work, a volume for reading and re-reading, one to dip into and return to, and to be warmly recommended. It comprises a rare set of fictional delights.

And one really is talking about fifty years of mature work. In his preface, Pritchett is not only being perceptive when he describes the stories in his 1920s volume *The Spanish Virgin* as practice work (and none of them are collected here), he's also right to feel that he had already "found a distinctive voice", "discovered my voice", by the 1930s. "Many Are Disappointed", about a quartet of thirty cyclists on holiday from the office who are looking out for luscious women as well as for the pub and the Roman road marked on their map, and who have to settle instead for the mere cups of tea, dull tomato sandwiches and poorly faded print of the so-called "tavern" they've come across. This story stood out sharply in 1937 from the rest of the "Seven English Stories" among which it first appeared in the fourth number of John Lehmann's distinguished literary magazine *New Writing*. It proved to be as good a story as Lehmann ever published, it sticks in the mind, in fact, as one of the finest short stories to have appeared in the 1930s. And it's as memorable in its way as anything Pritchett was to produce later. By his own and his century's thirties — he and it are the same age — Pritchett was well into his stride: a pace that, astonishingly, he's been able to maintain ever since.

An affair of mapping, bicycling, and crossing strange terrains ("My God! and Bert. What a country!"). "Many Are Disappointed" is a fine representative of the period of midtwenties, new-country fiction whose customary tropes it deploys so neatly. And Pritchett's stories have gone on deftly picking up whatever is current by way of images and self-images, always on the alert for the illustrative moment, the representative character of each decade they're bold in. Unfettered by modernism's self-historicism and introspectiveness, Pritchett has kept up the honourable and important business of fiction as social observing. So that if you want England — pungent, or bombed, afflicted by ration-book or spiv, England stripping its pine, or getting into "boutique" antiques, or being fooled by pliations of foreigners on the

Coping with the bigger words

Valentine Cunningham

streets of London, Pritchett's stories are where the whole kaleidoscopic documentary delightfully unravels. Pritchett's eye for telling surfaces of all kinds was bright at the beginning, and it has stayed impressively undimmed: The oak woods were naked and as green as canker. They stood like old men, and below them were sweet plantains of larch where the clockwork pheasants went off like toys in the rainy afternoons. At night you heard a farm dog bark like a pistol and sometimes, over an hour and half's walk away, the whistle of a train. But that was all. It was derelict country: frost with its teeth fast in the ground, the wind running finer than sand through a chancelless sky or the solitary drab of water in the rain legging it over the grass — that was all one heard or saw there.

That was all. Only a Nadine Gordimer or (occasionally) an H.E. Bates can make you feel a landscape as that passage from Pritchett's early "The Sailor" does. What's more, this language of description, fetching as its muscular pointiness, its stunning similes and ranging metaphors are, is not all Pritchett is capable of. From the start his trademark has been making human moments into epiphanies through memorable phrases, vivid tags and scraps of ideolot captured by roaming and plundering the language registers of an extraordinary breadth of classes and sects, odd social crannies, dark and curious corners of behaviour.

"Many are disappointed": it's in that phrase of the careful, washed-out teardrop that she and her story really live. It was in discovering her voice and the voices of her kind that Pritchett discovered his own voice, and how to make his stories speak. And again and again he hits off this impressive trick. "Do you a nice spotted dick?", "Say, we let some Error in that time." "This is the job." "Al love it when you are severe." "She's played everyone up": thus the landlocked sailor turned handyman, the podgy transcendentalist, the lustful preacher, the dried-up, masochistic private-schoolmaster, the irked local councillor, reveal themselves to their circle and to us. And when whole conversations are made out of such stuff — as in "Things As They Are" ("Not with a belt," said Mrs Foster, "I will not be hit with a belt") or "When My Girl Comes Home" ("It was proved in court that he didn't," said Constance briefly), Pritchett can sound magically anticipatory of Pinter's best.

What he's celebrating is the heroicism of banal life: of the skanky, ugly lady from Leicester telling lies to glamorize her boring and cowardly husband, of the fat preacher with the weak heart who has evolved multiple devices for keeping strenuousness at bay. Ordinary people, made marginal and socially insignificant by provinciality or lack of intelligence, or by the chosen exiles of enthusiastic religiosity (and Pritchett enters more knowledgeably than anyone else now save perhaps Stanley Middleton the shadowy words of the Gospel Hall, the Mission. Tent, the faith-healer's parlour): people like this are shown striving to cope, especially by their little sayings, their blunted verbal

stratagems, their ritually smoothed out counters of exchange, with the pressing urgency of wider experience and bigger words. "I mean", slate-miner's son Sidney, who works in a posh grocer's, will ask of everything and everyone, hanging on grimly to the life of a saving concept, are you, is his friend, was the Duke of Wellington "sincere"? "You make your own life", insists the barber, groping for reasonableness from standardized wisdoms, amidst his lurid tale of jealousies, poisons and cut-throat razors. "That's it", says Bill Williams, the wide-boy home from the Japanese POW camp, trying to show he's up with Filida, but floundering because he doesn't know she had a Japanese husband which means she has a key doko" when the Japs invade "you had to know your way round and talk a bit of the lingo".

Pritchett sympathizes most with people who have problems knowing their way round and managing the lingo. About those who manoeuvre more adroitly through the tangles of words he allows most doubts to settle. He admires their skilled survival, but also distinctly feels that to become too strong, to become at worst all voice, less person than megaphone — like the unfrocked cleric in "The Voice" who sings indestructibly from below the bomb rubble of his old church, or the lifelong radical lady speaker in "The speech" whose words sent boys to their deaths. Spain is to have allowed the verbal means of personal salvation to get hellishly out of hand.

The Pauline language — salvation, damnation — comes naturally because it is Pritchett's own. His narratives are full of Bible-punchers, high on Biblical phraseology and the analogies they draw between bombing or bonfires of family heirlooms and Hell. The very first narrator in this collection declares himself a puritan. Lots of the characters are totalitarians. They live within and are annoyed by, religious constraints. The rather strange blind lawyer in "Blind Love" makes his church-going mistress rub spittle and dirt Christ-like over his eyes. It doesn't, of course, work. Like all of these people's professed faiths and Biblicisms it's revealed as a device for gaining power over others. In Pritchett's fiction religious faith is usually bad faith. And one of Pritchett's virtues is that he refuses to get too heated about that; both he and his people accept a sense of sin, a sacred conscience, as normal. Pritchett is superb at presenting the moral lapse. And, characteristically, no one wishes to cast the first stone at Jap-marrying Filida because "sooner or later" their gossip "came to a closed door in everybody's conscience. There were men who had got false medical certificates, deserters, raton frauds, black marketeers, the pilferers of Army stores". It's noticeable, however, that Pritchett's tolerance wears thinnest, and his usual worries about the slick language-manipulators are most clear, in the presence of the powerfully puritanical people like the awful Charles Thwaite in "A Debt of Honour", the canting Catholic husband who returns after years of absence to squeeze his wife for more cash, and who walks off with her last treasure, her fur coat, after torturing

her once more with his masterful gibes about sin and divorce and her "indecent" pictures.

These twisted puritans — and they include the self-righteous lady sermonizer of the Left, and the Leftist editor whose self-love is quickly uncovered by his third-world female fan — make such powerful fictional presences because it seems that in looking into their deterring depths Pritchett is illuminating something deeply felt in his own. His lustfully corrupt religious men itch to lay bare, to get their hands on the skin beneath women's clothes — a desire oddly akin not just to the story-teller's keenness to expose but also to the fascination repeatedly shown by these stories for the flesh beneath women's dresses. And not unlike their puritans, Pritchett's stories are often as worried by the business of exposure as they are animated by it. Unnearly, bits of bodies come disconcertingly alive as Pritchett uncovers them for our attention. Teeth have a way of throwing the reader as well as characters when they're bared, as they often are. So, for that matter, do eyebrows, exposed frequently in Pritchett's fiction (as well as in his criticism). "They were staring at her eyebrows. I said before that her face was an extension of her nakedness. I say it again. Those eyebrows of hers were painted and looked like the only things she had on; they were like a pair of beetles with turned-up tails that had settled on her forehead." And what about tongues, ultimate instrument of Pritchett's strength and chief means of strength-in-weakness as his people acquire? Mrs Johnson of "Blind Love" is all tongue, her mouth hot with Cockney toughness, her body embraced beneath her blouse by a huge birthmark. "This ugly blob — dark as blood, like a ragged liver on a butcher's window, or some obscene island with ragged edges": "like a red tongue". Living with a tongue like that is evidently difficult. Exposed on her wedding night it shocks her husband into instant separation. A crooked faith-healer grows about her swimming-pool and craves a sight of it, but only the love of her blind lover helps her to come to terms with her stained self, gaudy tongue and all. "Blind Love" story is titled; and though blind love may not be much, it's better, Pritchett implies, than no love at all when you go about, as his fiction does, in the excitingly worrisome places where people live so vividly by their tongues.

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June 1982, 280 pp., 0 04 341021 0 Hardback £15.00.

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Author, Author

Competition No. 76
Readers are invited to identify the source of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than July 16. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers to be opened, or failing that the most nearly correct — in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration.
1 My darling, please believe that I was to be anyone, it would have been yours. I've really been far from you. I could show, if I were able, how to go mad. Please wear the

ear-rings. Please take this money and buy a scooter and go where we used to go — or do what you want with it. Please look after yourself. O God, if only I was worth waiting for.
2 My Precious Dream-Rabbit, I'm writing this on the terrace outside the hotel. It's a lovely day, and how I wish you were with me, because I miss you all the time, and it's perfectly foul to think that when I get back you will have popped off to America and I shan't see you for ages. I'm dashed if I know how I shall stick it out.
Competition No. 72
Winner: Mr M. H. Fairbank
Answers:
All are by W. Somerset Maugham.

1 Soon after breakfast Mary Ann brought in *The Times*. Mr Carey shared it with two neighbours. He had it from ten till one, when the gardener took it over to Mr Ellis at the Limes, with whom it remained till seven; then it was taken to Miss Brooks at the Manor House, who, since she got it so late, had the advantage of keeping it.
2 *Of Human Bondage*, Chapter 6.
3 The masters had no patience with modern ideas of education, which they read of sometimes in *The Times* or the *Guardian*, and hoped fervently that King's School would remain true to its old traditions.
4 *Of Human Bondage*, Chapter 15.
5 I have never failed to read the *Literary Supplement of The Times*. It is a salutary discipline to consider the vast number of books that are written, the fair hopes with which their authors see them published, and the fate which awaits them.
6 *The Moon and Sceptre*, Chapter 2.

Choosing between clichés

Christopher Hitchens

WILLIAM RODGERS

The Politics of Change
199pp. Secker and Warburg. £7.95
(paperback, £3.95).
0 436 42080 5

MICHAEL MEACHER

Socialism with a Human Face: The political economy of Britain in the 1980s
295pp. Allen and Unwin. £15.
0 04 320150 4

The accepted categories of British politics show stubborn resistance to redefinition. For the most part we continue to judge actions by reputations instead of reputations by actions. Thus, the Prime Minister is repeatedly and uselessly identified as "a monetarist" despite the profusion of his Treasury. Thus, the Leader of the Opposition is lazily identified as a socialist despite his evident distaste for anything more than mild dirigisme laced with insularity. Most odd of all, the Social Democratic Party, which is concerned with the preservation of British politics and institutions in their post-war centrist pattern, is believed to be bent on "breaking the mould".

In this Lilliputian world, which is chiefly written about by correspondents and practitioners who have very little interest in keeping the clichés alive, it is only exceptionally that a genuine political book is written, or indeed read. There was a time when social democrats freely quoted Edward Bernstein and even Anthony Crosland, while more traditional socialists would riposte with R. H. Tawney, G. D. H. Cole and (when they dared) Karl Marx himself. The Conservatives, who usually feel less need of ideological reinforcement, had Hays and Cakeshott and, since the collapse of Heath, have made half-hearted gestures at their disinterest. Generally, though, explicitness was good enough for our grandfathers and might be expected to outlive intellectual fads in our own time.

The need for the programmatic book is still felt most keenly on the left of centre. This may be why, at first glance, these books by William Rodgers and Michael Meacher exhibit so many superficial resemblances. Both have portentous titles. Both are designed to plug present-day gaps in the political front. Both give the impression of having been written on the last City train to their authors' respective northern constituencies. Both bear the heavy impress of mentor (Gaiskill for Rodgers and Benn for Meacher). Both are written with a practised eye for sudden shifts in public opinion.

Of the two, I should unhesitatingly nominate Rodgers as the more successful in this respect. He has more learnt how to get away with things and that learning is his main — one might say, his sole — political skill. Imagine the grave nodding among the lobby correspondents as he intones the following in his introduction:

But how many Labour politicians regularly include in a public speech a ringing declaration of faith in a mixed economy? How many argue the role of profits in the private sector? The conventional wisdom inhibits. Some matters are better not said abroad — or mentioned only in passing. Similarly, it is strange that Conservative Ministers should feel uncomfortable about discussions with the TUC when a third of all trade unionists lately voted Conservative and the TUC is a major influence on industry and the economy. It is strange that the CBI — representing most of the British industry, including the public sector — should not have easy and informal relations with most Labour Members of Parliament.

Here we have the familiar, something-for-everyone paragraph that has come to typify the prose style of the Social Democrats. It reminds one of nothing so much as the old Wilson-Fleetham speech about the "mixed" nature of industry. The example, yet Rodgers apparently regarded it as an act of superior political courage and

iconoclast to echo these hackneyed sentiments.

Note also the question-begging. Either the TUC is a force for torpor and waste in the national economy (as the SDP really maintains) or it is not. (The fact that many trade unionists vote Conservative is neither here nor there — nor is it "lately", but a steady factor in the last dozen or so general elections.) Of course it is a "major influence on industry and the economy". Rodgers adores the TUC. But he prefers the safe ground of calling for dialogue rather than taking a position on the outcome. Fair enough — except that he is calling for a party which will dispense with "judging and muddling".

Still, a kind of even-handedness has served Rodgers well in the past and he guesses, probably correctly, that it is this old ingredient of politics, rather than any fresh departure, which commands the SDP to the voters of today. He is thus extremely careful to avoid sharp questions even when he has to raise them. For example, he lays a little more stress than is modest on his twenty years as an MP and minister. Most of those years were spent on defence and foreign policy. Indeed, it was his disagreement with Labour's policy to encourage unilateralism that in large measure caused his defection. Yet the book contains practically nothing on nuclear weapons as a defence policy, and less than nothing on foreign affairs. Hidden away in a banal rumination on the trials of ministerial and civil service existence we find the following:

What became known as the Chevaline programme for the improvement of Polaris missiles (eventually costing the taxpayer £1,000 million) was not explained to the House of Commons until (in a Statement on 24 January 1981) it had been completed. The Defence White Paper of 1975 had said of Polaris, "We shall maintain its effectiveness." Subsequently, as Minister of State for Defence, I was

instructed to say that the Government was "up-dating" Polaris, although not going in for "a new generation" of nuclear weapons. There was no question, for example, of "MIRV-ing". It is impossible to believe that those towards whom secrecy was justified, in particular the Soviet Union, failed to put two-and-two together or would have been wiser had the costs of the programme been revealed. A Member of Parliament with normal access to Washington defence gossip could also have made a shrewd guess at what was happening. Why, then, was Parliament not told?

Is he asking us or telling us? He's certainly not recommending anything. What he reveals, evidently without intention, is his own familiarity with coterie politics and his habituation to what he would no doubt call, with his gift of phrase, the corridors of power. There, evidently, are where he intends to roam come what may. I rate this book as the least amusing of the many SDP volumes; less weighty even than David Owen's and much less hilarious than Shirley Williams'. In terms of pith, it ranks with Jaroslav Hasek's famous manifesto for "The Party of Moderate Progress Within the Bounds of the Law".

Michael Meacher has tasted office but not power, and feels that the loss is ours as much as his. He writes with infinitely more energy and conviction than Rodgers, and his nerve of outrage has not been hopelessly dulled as has that of his rival. The very first page appears the tale of a "socialized reappraisal" and this tone is maintained fairly steadily throughout. What one gets, in return for perusal and sometimes tiring reading, is a thoughtful and useful book.

Where William Rodgers spends a few self-regarding pages on the difference between being a "social democrat" and a "democratic socialist", Meacher spends much of his time arguing for a personal but

defensible definition of what socialism is in the first place. The ingredients are on first reading rather short of a surprise: planning, harnessed to full employment, aim for equality and reduce dependence on overseas exploitation. These are standard Bennite themes; all one can add is that the section on planning in this book is very detailed and involves many tiers of "planning agreement" and economic sector analysis. "Useful for the specialist" might be the best judgment here. But the chief interest of the book, and I suspect its chief motivation, is the argument about political democracy and individual liberty.

Meacher is perfectly well aware that most people are not socialists because most people are suspicious of, or hostile to, the extent of bureaucracy, conformity and mediocrity that socialism seems to necessitate. He takes this point on the chin, and neatly floors himself in the process. A whole chapter, very dense and passionate, is given over to the question, "Does a Socialist Society Already Exist?" Meacher prints a little chart which "rates" five putative socialist régimes under seven socialist headings. The Soviet Union only passes one test, which oddly enough is "real full employment". Yugoslavia comes out as "political democracy with individual freedom". Despite these absurdities, and the sophomoric way in which they are laid out, it does emerge gradually that Meacher's ideal was the Dubcek experiment in reformist socialism. This is a humane and reasonable conclusion, if rather an unexciting one.

At any rate, the chapter shows more grappling with hard issues than anything in *The Politics of Change*. Behind Meacher's eagerly flashing Fabian spectacles, a brain and a conscience are striving to engage. *Socialism with a Human Face* suffers, however, from being poorly written. The following passage is not untypical:

After all, in the last analysis, what is

life for? Man, even capitalist man, cannot live by material things alone. Yet at present he is severely starved of moral or spiritual values by the sheer unbalanced weight of materialistic propaganda grossly distorting the value system of society in the economic interests of the capitalist Establishment. Both the religious side of man and the secular construct of the welfare state, each of them motivated by aspirations which transcend the self, have been downplayed by the selfish forces of materialism, and a counter-revolution is urgently needed if Western man is to rise above the distortion of his present unidimensional mould.

We can see what he means here (the Marcusian echo makes me feel ten years younger) but only because the ideas expressed are so trite.

Britain's politicians may be Lilliputian, but the problems they face are Brobdingnagian. Probably the greatest issue of democracy itself. Meacher, at least, has a sense of the overweening power of the state and the permanent bureaucracy. His chapters on this topic, which are well researched and presented, are better than the callow use of the phrase "capitalist Establishment" might suggest. He has some persuasive evidence that the Treasury and its political allies have used IMF power, and pressures on sterling, purely to win internal battles and preserve a sort of state within the state. This, not reselection of MPs, is the real threat to the oft-invoked sovereignty of Parliament.

Some of Britain's problems are too large for either Rodgers or Meacher to face. The relationship with its Irish neighbours is ignored. The arms race is merely touched upon. British readers who are black or brown will not find that they worried either distinguished MP very much. But at least *Socialism with a Human Face* can be criticized for failing at various points. *The Politics of Change* should be criticized for not trying at all.

Michael Mason

PETER CONRAD

Television — The Medium and Its Manners
170pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£6.95 (paperback, £2.95).
0 7100 9041 2

This book starts off by describing the television set made available to the dons at Christ Church, Oxford. Allegedly, it is "hidden away in a musty chamber", and "masquerades as a Gothic cocktail cabinet". "What conclusion will the author draw from this fact?" you ask yourself (only later, when the book's loosey waxy facts have dawned on you, do you wonder if the Senior Common Room television set at Christ Church is like this at all).

Mr Conrad is himself a Christ Church don, but an unorthodox one: he writes books on television, for example. So it looks as if some kind of repudiation to his colleagues for their intellectual prudery about television is in preparation here. But no. Christ Church's arrangements are supposed to be equivalent to those found in "suburban houses", where the set is placed on a trolley, or has a vase of flowers on top. We are all ashamed of watching television, according to Conrad. From this is deduced a certain genteel character in the medium itself, and the book goes on to describe an obnoxious fashion, chapter by chapter, its various branches: chat-show, soap-opera, news, commercials, and so forth.

It is instructive to see how Conrad contrives his equation of the dons and the suburbanites. The television on a trolley is like the "display of sweets" in "fancy restaurants". The vase of flowers "acclimatizes" the set; it is comparable to having a set hanging from the ceiling, "like a potted plant". Everything is transacted in the figures of speech here, nothing in the literal sense. The reader who resists this bullying by simile and metaphor will rightly object that television sets are actually rather candidly present in suburban homes: at the foot of the bed, for example. By no means, according to Conrad. This is the "shiftest" arrangement of all, because such sets have been "smuggled" into the bedrooms. Even the 1950s' fan of the CBS *Today Show*, who knocked down his living room for his beloved programme, somehow represented a continuation of the television-as-furniture pathology: "granting it entry into our houses as furniture, we've allowed it to take over those houses".

So right at the outset of his book Conrad is involved in transparent perversities of argument. Why does he not grant that having a television set at the end of the bed shows a less

embarrassed attitude than the dons at Christ Church can muster? And why does he want to deny this degree of incongruity about television to the suburban viewer? Part of the answer to the first question is that the book is wilful about all such deductions, a quality which just happens to show up with particular clarity when the argument involves the significance of human actions. We are familiar with the means by which humans express embarrassment, so we probably will not be bamboozled by Conrad's play with dessert trolleys and potted plants. But, while we know the rules of this semantic system, there are others which are less agreed, and areas for which such rules only dubiously exist.

A typical and conspicuous feature of recent European and American academic life, on the liberal arts side, has been the claimed discovery of semantic rules for such areas, and here Conrad is trendily abreast of the times. Not that his book is solemn or jargonized. But it exhibits, albeit in a mercifully vulgarized form, that abandon in finding and interpreting meanings in human cultural products which is the hallmark of structuralism. Interpretations made in this spirit are habitually rendered safe from refutation (and therefore vacuous) by a "Heads I win, tails you lose" strategy. This is the great beauty of "binary" systems of meaning, beloved of structuralism. Add to the discovery of a binary system the assumption that the absence of a feature can be as significant as its presence, and there is no way you can be refuted. A case in point is Conrad's demonstration that television schedules "don't merely follow the course of the week but impose their own shape on it". Monday, as the start of the working week, is the occasion (in Britain) for programmes such as *Panorama* and *World in Action*, "documenting the intractable realities of the world". "The idleness of our weekends", however, is betokened by "a paradoxical celebration of... sports on Saturday, westerns on Sunday afternoon". By this logic the argument would be just as strong if *Panorama* were "paradoxically" broadcast on Sunday, and football on Monday. (The full intellectual impertinence of the comparison is actually not apparent at the time: some chapters later, in his discussion of television news, Conrad's thesis is exactly that programmes like *Panorama* don't document reality.)

Here is Conrad on another binary opposition, black-and-white versus colour:

Technical self-aggrandizement didn't help the movies for black and white and the small screen came to constitute a style just at the moment that the coloured widened screens of the 1950s made them redundant. Hence the slick, sleazy glamour of film noir... when television caught up with

brief history of dance and description of works in current repertoires. All this has been covered more extensively before (most recently by Clement Crisp and Mary Clarke), but the value of Kerensky's book lies in its compression and accessibility. There are esoteric, more urbane aspects too. The chapter on "critics assesses, somewhat disparagingly, the prolix, analytical content of new American dance writing, against the lighter, shorter British approach, and we get what amounts to an apologia for Kerensky's profession. Poorly paid, beleaguered on both sides of the footlights, over-exposed to their subjects, ballet reviewers are constantly having to guard against favouritism, nepotism — in the case of the two married ballerinas — and free trips offered by ballet managements with reciprocal favours in mind. Kerensky is unrepentant, too, about the indisputable sexual appeal of ballet for many critics and fans "who go partly for the sensual thrill of seeing good-looking young people, doing athletic movements in brief, tight-fitting costumes".

He is clearly capable of offering the kind of topical inside information that would give this book wider appeal; there are two good passages on embey-

the movies by acquiring colour, the most precious intervals were those reserved for old black and white movies.

This peculiar line of thought illustrates the struggle Conrad frequently has in representing the medium of television as *sublimis*, and it also brings forward a favourite idea, namely, that television is an *agent*, capable of autonomous action. This is part and parcel of the book's fashionable ascription of meaning to such things as the weekly pattern of television programmes. From meaning it is a short step to intention and purpose, and the chief rhetorical device of this book is, in fact, the trope of television's "aim" or "ambition". Here again Conrad is saved from the further reaches of intellectual turpitude by a certain concern for intelligibility. He cannot bring himself to give the idea of television-as-agent a full Galilei panoply, and hence it appears in its true light: as a conceit — and one that is called upon to do too much work. There is also genuine residue of a conventional vocabulary ("Character in television is form not content") which may prompt the thought that structuralist criticism is only a fancy development of that *ide fixe* of twentieth-century aesthetics: the expressiveness of the formal element in art.

If television is malign in its effect, as Conrad claims, the conceit that it is a kind of person is reprehensible, frivolously conferring blame for a socially bad phenomenon on a thing which cannot in reason be culpable. The truly guilty parties must be the programme makers, of whom we hear nothing in this book, and the subscribers to television services. But the latter — in keeping with that perverse insistence that suburban viewers are victims and not welcome to television — are exonerated also on Conrad's account. We are to suppose what is clearly wrong: that television doesn't reflect the attitude of those who use it. Take one of Conrad's leading examples, Johnny Carson and *The Tonight Show*. He argues that this long-running chat-show depends for its success on its refusal to obey certain television conventions (this should, of course, make it a serious stumbling block for the argument of the book, which in Conrad's logic it is not). For instance, Carson

refrains pages which misfire, because he can then slip out of his own act, grimace at the material his writers have served up to him, and tell the audience, "Yeah, you were right about that one."

Hardly a device unknown to comedians outside television and, in this context, part of Carson's rather wearisome reliance on the humour of mistakes and gaffes. As such it surely says less about television than it does about America: a society which

attaches an extraordinary importance to smoothness of performance in public (and which, unconsciously, registers "fumbles" on the scoreboards of its national sport).

For Conrad, however, television can never exhibit life in this way: "this is television's ambition: . . . to operate within a . . . closed circuit of self-reference". The cup of clichés runneth over, but an underlying question remains: why is an intelligent man like Conrad so enthralled by a preposterous way of arguing? Finding fancy semantic systems is connected with impossible attributions of responsibility which is connected with the isolation of a cultural phenomenon from its society . . . but Conrad must be moved by more than a chain of ideas. A matter of fundamental disposition is involved, representative of something potent, at the moment, in our intellectual culture: Perhaps the most betraying sentence in this book goes as follows: "There is always a logic to television's arbitrary juxtapositions." It has a disquieting resemblance to those impossible propositions which are sometimes held to be the core of religious belief. It seems to report a determination about how things should be, rather than a discovery that they are so. For the writing of this book Conrad must have watched a lot of American television during the year 1980. The main objection to the book is not, however,

that it is biased in its coverage, but rather that it dresses up what is, at best, a kind of punning as a reasoned statement about an important topic: that it is guided by the consideration, "what is clever, unexpected, and entertaining?" and not by that of, "what is truthful?"

It happens to have been published, in Britain, at a time when its way of taking television to task seems particularly light-minded. An argument is being waged about the reporting of events in the Falklands, and the antagonists in this argument would be surprised to hear that television is "self-referring". The shameful requirement that the BBC should report only the British government's point of view on the war, proceeding from the highest authorities in this country, shows how impressed they are by the capacities of the medium to refer. The chief content of recent British television news — the Falkland Islands crisis and the Papeal visit — is extremely informative about British society at the moment. The big words that do so much harm, in James Joyce's phrase, seem to have lost none of their authority. For some people this evidence of the power of ancient irrationalities — aggression within the species, and belief in the supernatural — is extremely bitter. It is not made more palatable by Mr Conrad's modish exhortations simply to blame the medium that brings it to our notice.

On the road

Charles Fox

DON GEORGE

The Real Duke Ellington
272pp. Robson. £7.95.
0 85051 166 9

Few public figures have paraded themselves as flamboyantly as Duke Ellington did while contriving to pose as a serious, even a profound, thinker about their private lives. In his autobiography, *Music Is My Mistress*, he omitted any mention of his marriages and proffered a view of the world in which everyone appeared to dwell in marzipan cottages. Admirers of Ellington's music, convinced that the man possessed more intellectual and emotional substance than he cared to reveal, have been understandably eager to know more about his everyday life as well as his working routine.

Merger Ellington, Duke's son, came up with a useful memoir; now we are treated to what really constitutes a set of anecdotes by Don George, who put words to some of Ellington's tunes (their most successful collaboration was "I'm Beginning To See The Light").

Colin MacInnes once confided that Ellington always struck him as a cross between an African aristocrat and a South American cad. That was the public image; the closest that the private man came to vaudeville — and the very word contradicts Ellington's particular brand of gallantry — was in his taste for dalliance, dealt with at perhaps too great a length in George's recollections, although it is instructive to discover that mistress and mistress could not always be kept apart.

If Ellington seems to have evaded the permanence of normal family life (he spent a good deal of his time on tour — in America or around the world), he could be said to have acquired a band that supplied him with an abundance of crises and tantrums. The same musicians were on the road for decade after decade, an inspired but temperamental crew. George indicates at least a few of the problems, even if, in describing how the blind singer, A. J. Hibbler, would be guided from wings to microphone by Ellington's voice, he fails to mention that the saxophonist Ben Webster delighted in sneaking out a foot and trying to trip him up.

The aura of show-business hangs around a good deal of *The Real Duke Ellington*, with big stars hugging one another and inevitably behaving like angels. As it is hard to be sure when a performer is sincere, it is hard to tell when a writer is sincere. In writing about

somebody as obsessed with visual style as Ellington was, it seems reasonable to give details of his extensive wardrobe. But do we really need to know that he called his self-designed ties kissy-poo? More revealing, perhaps, is the news that Ellington drank Coca-Cola with four spoonfuls of sugar and always kissed acquaintances — even President Nixon — four times ("One for each cheek").

There is some annoying repetition (the story about how Nat Cole began singing in public gets told on p. 77, then again on p. 83) as well as a few errors of omission. Arthur Whetsol (George spells it Wetzol), a trumpet player who died in 1940, is observed twenty-nine years later at celebrations in the White House. Ellington did not write "A Night in Tunisia" (that was Dizzy Gillespie's tune) but he did, despite George's scepticism, compose the score for a film — *Change of Mind*, directed by Robert Stevens in 1969 — about a white man's brain being transplanted into a black man's body.

The Real Duke Ellington has inadequacies, is frequently sentimental, and yet does make plain some of the paradoxes within Ellington's life-style. Like a lot of people he talked a lot, writes George, "but that really was his way of telling all the things he didn't want to talk about." In the end, of course, the music is what matters; and that sounds ever better — the marvellous 1940 recordings, for instance — as the years roll on. But the man behind it remains a tantalizing presence. And never so enigmatic, perhaps, as when he stood on-stage, assuring an audience that he loved them madly.

The newly published Volume 10 in the "Dictionary of Literary Biography" which, since its inception in 1978, has dealt exclusively with American writers, takes as its theme *Modern British Dramatists, 1900-1945* (2 volumes, A-L, 301pp, M-Z, 325pp. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 0 8103 0937-9). Besides the most theatrical names of Wilde, Shaw, Noel Coward, Harley Granville-Barker, Somerset Maugham and Sean O'Casey, the sixty-five biographical articles on topiary many lesser-known dramatists such as Lennox Robinson, Mordaunt Sharry, Austin Clarke, Gordon Daviot, Clifford Bax, George Shells and Sutton Vane. Performance data, where available, accompany each entry, together with bibliographies and notes on references sources, including the location of papers. Volume 2 is completed by articles on C. S. Lewis, Philip Larkin, John Galsworthy and the Royal Court and Abbey Theatres.

The Togliatti line

Walter Kendall

DONALD SASSOON

The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party From the Resistance to the Historic Compromise

259pp. Frances Pinter. £15.
0 86187 203 7

Is the Italian Communist Party (PCI) a revolutionary party constrained by objective circumstances to pursue largely reformist objectives? Has it "betrayed" the Revolution? Or was it never a revolutionary party at all?

Donald Sassoon in *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party* readily concedes that the PCI deliberately set out to block such revolutionary opportunities as existed in the years 1943-48, even going so far as to unilaterally break the Anti-Fascist Front and to join an openly bourgeois government under a reactionary king. He argues somewhat too glibly, some might think, that this was no "betrayal" of socialism, since Togliatti, the party's Moscow-imposed leader, never intended to do otherwise. Millions of Italian, however, including, it is generally believed, "Communism", to stand for something different. One might have thought they did so with some reason.

Sassoon clearly considers the PCI to be revolutionary in "essence" by virtue of its origins as a subordinate section of the Communist International founded by the Bolsheviks in their own image after 1917, an origin which clearly demarcates the party from "social democracy" of whatever stripe. PCI policy, Sassoon argues, was settled at the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in Moscow in 1925, and "Togliatti" and by implication, "Borghese", have continued Italian policy more or less consistently ever since.

There are some problems here. In the first place, this approach would appear to assume what has to be

proved, namely that to be "pro-Soviet" is to be "revolutionary". In the second, it clearly implies that Togliatti's much vaunted "Italian Road to Socialism" is not "Italian" at all. In the third place, other Communist parties, most notably the Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, also the Yugoslav, and less successfully the Greek, were equally bound by Comintern policy, yet acted in a very different way.

The problem exists, too, at a deeper level. Is the test of "revolutionism" to be found in theory or in practice? If the test is purely theoretical, then all the arguments are circular, and we are back in the age of scholasticism. The truth is to be established by the exegetical examination of texts, scarcely, it at all, by reference to events in the real world. Sassoon does indeed appear to reason very much in this way. His texts are mainly PCI texts. The PCI is revolutionary by definition. That its action may be "reformist" and much of its behaviour reactionary is thus beside the point. The PCI in much the same fashion is the party of the working class, even though industrial workers have never been more than a minority within its ranks.

One might have expected Sassoon, as a professed Marxist, to trace the evolution of PCI policy against the background of the political traditions, and the economic and class structure of Italian society, while detailing the organizational form and internal class composition of the PCI. One would have hoped also to find some portrayal of the other actors on the social scene, to be given some precise estimate of the PCI's political successes and failures, and to be shown how party policy emerged from a necessary interaction between objective and subjective factors. Unfortunately, however, the author reveals no knowledge of the nature and problems of the Italian economy, nor of the complex history of the Italian labour movement, and the Italian political system as a whole. Nor does he mention any of the worthwhile

sociological studies of the PCI which have appeared in recent years. Instead, the reader is offered a largely "idealist" work which, somewhat in the manner of the much abused "cult of the individual", seeks to portray the development of the PCI as the outcome of the behaviour of one Great Man, Palmiro Togliatti, whose thought in its turn was shaped and determined by another still Greater Man, Antonio Gramsci.

It has to be admitted that at first sight this presentation has a certain convincing simplicity. The PCI is still indeed the "party of Togliatti" much as the Russian party in its time was the "party of Lenin" and of Stalin, the French of Thorez, the German of Thälmann — or the British of Pollitt for that matter. Nor can there be any doubt that Togliatti's return to Italy after many years' absence in Moscow constituted a turning-point in the history of the PCI and of Italian society generally. But are things, especially in Italy, always what they seem? Togliatti certainly flew to Italy from Moscow some months after the Comintern was formally disbanded. But did he leave of his own volition, or at Stalin's behest? There can be no doubt of the importance which the Italian party leadership in the later postwar years has attributed to Gramsci. But is Gramsci truly the fountainhead of PCI behaviour? Or is his thought merely a consciously manufactured fetish behind which the PCI apparatus manoeuvres to advance its own bureaucratic interests, and to increase its influence on Italian society, and latterly to achieve greater latitude in its relations with Moscow? Is ideology paramount? Or could it be merely self-interest?

In 1943-44 Andrei Vyshinsky, Russia's representative on the Allied Control Council for Italy, found himself hedged in on every side: powerless to influence events, and a means of breaking out of this isolation Stalin, in March 1944, recognized the Badoglio government, thus obtaining direct influence on the Italian political

scene. Some fourteen days later Togliatti landed in Italy, reversed the Communist policy, and initiated the "turn" which took the Communists into a coalition government under the King, thus further increasing Russian leverage.

On this view the PCI's assigned role from the very beginning was to influence Italian society in direction favourable to the aims of Russian foreign policy, not at all to take power on its own account or to re-shape Italian society in a socialist direction. That is why the PCI sought to become a mass, parliamentary party, rather than a cadre organization, and why it needed to find in Gramsci an authentic national guru with whom to authenticate its own somewhat shifty credentials. That is why the party has adopted Eurocommunism, which quite apart from helping to ensure its own survival also seeks to create an "independent" neutral, pro-Soviet Europe. There is thus indeed a basic continuity in PCI postwar policy, although not at all that which Sassoon perceives.

Sassoon begins his study with Togliatti's return. He sees this as independent both of Stalin's problems and Vyshinsky's role — of which indeed he appears to be quite unaware. He thus takes the PCI's own version of events at face value, thereby failing to exercise a proper critical sense. Togliatti on one occasion reproved a close colleague who had charged him with talking revolution while intending no more than reform. "Nino", Togliatti is reported to have said, "Non capisco. In Italia la politica è di destra. The warning is a valid one which all of us would do well to remember, not only in the present, but in the future as well.

On the whole though, *The Guinness Guide to Ballet* provides good, basic information focusing on leading companies and companies around the world, telling what it takes to be a professional choreographer, and giving a

Boxing clever with the box

Michael Mason

PETER CONRAD

Television — The Medium and Its Manners
170pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£6.95 (paperback, £2.95).
0 7100 9041 2

This book starts off by describing the television set made available to the dons at Christ Church, Oxford. Allegedly, it is "hidden away in a musty chamber", and "masquerades as a Gothic cocktail cabinet". "What conclusion will the author draw from this fact?" you ask yourself (only later, when the book's loosey waxy facts have dawned on you, do you wonder if the Senior Common Room television set at Christ Church is like this at all).

Mr Conrad is himself a Christ Church don, but an unorthodox one: he writes books on television, for example. So it looks as if some kind of repudiation to his colleagues for their intellectual prudery about television is in preparation here. But no. Christ Church's arrangements are supposed to be equivalent to those found in "suburban houses", where the set is placed on a trolley, or has a vase of flowers on top. We are all ashamed of watching television, according to Conrad. From this is deduced a certain genteel character in the medium itself, and the book goes on to describe an obnoxious fashion, chapter by chapter, its various branches: chat-show, soap-opera, news, commercials, and so forth.

It is instructive to see how Conrad contrives his equation of the dons and the suburbanites. The television on a trolley is like the "display of sweets" in "fancy restaurants". The vase of flowers "acclimatizes" the set; it is comparable to having a set hanging from the ceiling, "like a potted plant". Everything is transacted in the figures of speech here, nothing in the literal sense. The reader who resists this bullying by simile and metaphor will rightly object that television sets are actually rather candidly present in suburban homes: at the foot of the bed, for example. By no means, according to Conrad. This is the "shiftest" arrangement of all, because such sets have been "smuggled" into the bedrooms. Even the 1950s' fan of the CBS *Today Show*, who knocked down his living room for his beloved programme, somehow represented a continuation of the television-as-furniture pathology: "granting it entry into our houses as furniture, we've allowed it to take over those houses".

So right at the outset of his book Conrad is involved in transparent perversities of argument. Why does he not grant that having a television set at the end of the bed shows a less

brief

history of dance and description of works in current repertoires. All this has been covered more extensively before (most recently by Clement Crisp and Mary Clarke), but the value of Kerensky's book lies in its compression and accessibility.

There are esoteric, more urbane aspects too. The chapter on "critics assesses, somewhat disparagingly, the prolix, analytical content of new American dance writing, against the lighter, shorter British approach, and we get what amounts to an apologia for Kerensky's profession. Poorly paid, beleaguered on both sides of the footlights, over-exposed to their subjects, ballet reviewers are constantly having to guard against favouritism, nepotism — in the case of the two married ballerinas — and free trips offered by ballet managements with reciprocal favours in mind. Kerensky is unrepentant, too, about the indisputable sexual appeal of ballet for many critics and fans "who go partly for the sensual thrill of seeing good-looking young people, doing athletic movements in brief, tight-fitting costumes".

He is clearly capable of offering the kind of topical inside information that would give this book wider appeal; there are two good passages on embey-

stars in Britain and America, in which the Royal Ballet's Bryony Brind, Fiona Chadwick, Alessandra Perti and Karen Paisley, and the sixteen-year-old Darci Kistler of the New York City Ballet, are rightly singled out as ballerinas of the future. But the dense format of the book allows no more than a gesture towards the new, among a gesture towards the old, of platitudinous generalizations, reinforced by cynically antediluvian photographs. (One showing a mini-skirted baller student with a Sandra Dee-bee-lie receiving physiotherapy treatment, must have been taken in the mid-1960s.)

The photographs are poorly printed, those in colour yearning between a sepia blur and over-graphic garishness; and there are a number of pictures which dancers would presumably pay to have destroyed — like the one of Lesley Collier, looking like a leopard, caught between movements in the Rose Adagio. Grand jets: are perversely photographed from the front or on the way down, and there are two or three rigid studio poses in which the guest of the ballerina's rights has become the focal point of the shot. Robert Mendel miscaptioned as Michael, Coleman Cribbin, Kinsley as Wendy Ellis, and Cillian Lorraines as Monica Mason.

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BODLEY HEAD

commentary**Subtle feeling for a brass band**

Michael Holroyd

Captain Brassbound's Conversion
Theatre Royal, Haymarket

In his programme note on *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, the director Frank Hauser tells us that Shaw wrote this play "in 1899 expressly for Ellen Terry" and that "what stimulated Shaw originally was the publication in 1897 of *Travels in West Africa* by Mary Kingsley".

As the origin of *Brassbound*, Shaw pointed to a remark made by Ellen Terry on the birth of Gordon Craig's eldest daughter: that now she was a grandmother nobody would ever write her a play. "I immediately wrote *Brassbound* for her," he explained, "out of a natural desire to contradict" so she said. "It is a pretty story, though it does not seem to fit the fact that Rosemary Craig had been born over five years before Shaw began his play. The real motive behind it was similar to that behind his Napoleonic 'historiette' *The Man of Destiny*: to make another effort to infiltrate Henry Irving's Lyceum with Shawian drama or, in failing, to remove Ellen from the stage's castle and rescue her from the collapse of Irving's theatrical career."

Lady Cicely Waynflete is not exactly a portrait of Ellen Terry. It is a vehicle that incorporates something of her manner and magnifies it hugely. This was how he wanted her to be: this was how, if she was to subdue the monstrous Irving and finally become free of him, she must be. But Ellen, who had more fear in her than Shaw wished to acknowledge, could not recognize herself in the part. "Of course you never really meant Lady Cicely for me," she teased him. But he had. He had meant her, through the magic of his words, to become Lady Cicely and convert Irving. "Never was there a part so deeply written for a woman as this for you," he replied.

Go then, wretch, and get... some new part with a name like the latest hairwash, and be as romantic and picturesque as you please. Send to your library for two books of travel in Africa: one Miss Kingsley's (have you met her?) and the other H. M. Stanley's. Compare the brave woman with her commonsense and good will with the wild-beast man, with the elephantine, and his atmosphere of dread and murder... Have you found in your own life and your own small affairs no better way, no more instructive heart wisdom, no warrant for trusting to the good side of people instead of terrorizing the bad side of them? I - poor idiot - thought the distinction of Ellen Terry was that she had this heart wisdom. I accordingly give you a play in which you stand in the very place where Imperialism is most believed to be necessary... Oh Ellen, Ellen, Ellen, Ellen, Ellen. This is the end of everything.

The intensity of this letter pierced through Ellen's self-protective niceness as the play had never done. "Of course I know it's me all the while. My fault... What is the good of words to me? But words were all I had to give; the power of words to change our lives. And she could not change. To convert her words into her actions and make them come true would mean emerging from the womb of the Lyceum and orphaning herself from the sterile figure of Irving. She was in her fifties; it was too late."

The figure of Lady Cicely seems to have been an amalgam of various people: if her actress model was Ellen Terry and her historical model, Mary Kingsley, her literary model, Mary Kingsley's *The Witch of Atlas* which provided Shaw with a working title for the play. He makes specific reference to Shaw by having Lady Cicely state her determination "to go to those mountains which she saw from the mountain garden." The *Witch of Atlas* Mountain, where Shaw's *Witch of Atlas* lived. We'll make an excursion to them

tomorrow... By setting the action of his adventure in the place where Shelley's platonic vision of a white goddess quenched

the earth-consuming rage
Of gold and blood - 'till men should live and move

Harmonious as the stars above
Shaw was emphasizing the asexuality of her heroine's power. She is the female equivalent in Shaw's world of Caesar from *Caesar and Cleopatra* and an embodiment through the exercise of beneficent Will of the philosophy of fearless optimism he had worked out in *The Perfect Wagnerite*. She unscrupulously forces gentleness on everyone, having (as Shaw noted in his stage directions) the "steadfast candor peculiar to liars who read novels". Like Caesar, she is unorthodox and pragmatic, surrounded by harmless bullies brought up to believe in the justice and morality of vengeance, cruelty and punishment, whom she must constantly outwit. She is Shaw's ideal of womanhood whose model in life was Charlotte Payne-Townshend, the only woman who had apparently got the better of him in his philandering days; the conventional, matronly lady

History or homily

Graham Swift

Our Friends in the North
The Pit, Barbican Centre

As if acknowledging *Henry IV*, inaugurating the Barbican Theatre above, Peter Flannery subtitles his *Our Friends in the North*, which plays in The Pit downstairs, "A History Play" - a description which seems to deflect attention away from political purpose or even narrative and lay the emphasis on narrative and exposition. One of Flannery's main characters, Austin Donohue, a scheming, Newcastle councillor and MP, says, albeit in one of his more manic and self-deluding moments: "There's a war being waged right now... for control over people's perception of the last twenty years," and Flannery rises to the challenge, "with its implicit complications, of these words."

On a narrative level the play is admirably successful - up to a point. It is no small achievement to condense into an evening's theatre a period starting on the eve of the Wilson era and ending on the eve of Thatcherism. No small achievement either to weave together as many of that period's tacky strands: local government connivance over housing contracts in Newcastle (for Flannery's builder, Edwards, read the Reginald Maudling); and enter again Edwards/Poulson).

In one sense, of course, Flannery does not have to do any weaving together. The web of corruption does it for him. The connections between legitimate and shady spheres are now so lamentably familiar that Flannery's aspersions on the corrupt or clumsy (a senior civil servant inadvertently directing a power-by-to a nefarious club).

What are potentially more telling are the examples given of relatively innocent private individuals (if "private" is a valid word in this play's social milieu) drawn into the larger, vicious circles: amongst them, George, (excellently played - with a number, ominous passivity, by David Tennant), who drifts to London, learns about life in Soho, in prison and later, as a mercenary in Rhodesia, disintegrates line "I'm apologetic" (to political donors). The first occasion is in an early scene when he parts from his idealistic, party-jointing mate Nicky in Newcastle. The second is near the end of the play, with the gun of a

whom he had married a year before writing this play and who now controlled his domestic life.

The success of *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* largely depends upon the performance of Lady Cicely who is the only woman in the play. Penelope Keith has established a habit of making brief visits from the television screen into Shaw's world where she specializes in the Shavian superwoman. She made an unconvincing Orinthia (a part based on Mrs Patrick Campbell) in *The Apple Cart* but a vigorous Epifania Ognisanti di Paterna Fitzfassen (which owes something to Lady Astor) in *The Millionaire*. As Lady Cicely Waynflete she is well cast and strides through the part with confident control. The best scenes in the play are those where she and Brassbound (to whom John Turner gives a splendidly robust appearance) are alone on stage. Shaw's desperation somehow to get his work performed had led to a splendidly thought and painful feeling for a brass band. But when the stage is uncrowded, he sometimes allows a more complex and stimulating view of

Zimbabwe freedom-fighter pointed at his head. The implication is plain: no one is apologetic.

It's at such moments that the narrative prescription of "History Play" becomes stretched. For all his efforts to avoid drawing conclusions and any whiff of dogma, Flannery nudges us away from simple assimilation towards judgement and commitment. The play is dotted with large, resonant statements which bespeak the author's need for interpretation. The prostitute Rusty (Julia Hills), another of the play's London-struck northerners, expounds a metaphor of society as an asylum in which the most demented are the warders, the power-wielders. Roy Johnson (George Raistrick), the play's would-be corruption-purging police officer, warns, "when there's a moral vacuum, there's always something nasty waiting to race into it". Cliches need not lack truth and the characters might indeed feel these things, but it's hard to believe they would utter them quite so baldly without a playwright pressing them upon them.

Where the tension between history play and political homily most shows is towards the end, where there has evidently been much rewriting. To give historical completeness, material has been added which does little more than "bring us up to date". Hence the cursory talk amongst the police officers of escalating street violence and a perfunctory scene in which an American video merchant muscled in on Soho.

The real problem, though, is that the play - which begins with the words "There is no beginning", as if to imply the continuous, unschematized stream of history - must indeed have an end. Flannery struggles to supply one which gives dramatic resolution without posing some authorial advocacy, yet at the same time recognizes that history lacks dramatic resolutions. There is no transfigured Prince Hal here, to settle all questions. George returns to Britain, alive, from his Rhodesian experiences with a political commitment which is clearly, Flannery can neither endorse nor disavow that commitment, but in his final scene he does his utmost to render its significance open and ambiguous.

George comes nearest to being the play's central character, though closely challenged, in performance, terms at least, by Jim Broadbent's Austin Donohue, an unrelenting mixture of cynical operator and clown, whose sudden onset of wild laughter manages to convey that, for all his apparent cynicism, he is, as bemused by affairs as George himself is; however, and rightly so, given the bleak canvas, a deftly directed ensemble piece in

life to be heard.

The Morocco sets by Nicholas Georgiadis emphasize the musical-comedy-without-music aspect of the play, with David Collings (as Drinkwater) leading the corps de ballet of pirate sailors. But on the first night Michael Denison was too muffled and wooden to give the part of Sir Howard Hallam its full judicial authority. Frank Hauser's direction is competent. *Press Cuttings* currently being directed by Anthony Clark at the Orange Tree in Richmond, and it does not solve the various difficulties presented by *Brassbound* in performance. Shaw called it "the only play I planned and plotted" and the clockwork machinery of this planning and plotting tick rather tediously by during the first Act. The coda at the end of the third Act, too, where Lady Cicely is suddenly rescued from marriage to Brassbound by gunfire from his ship, seems very artificially tacked on - there is no sense of their waking from a trance. This was a trance, however, from which Shaw himself was to wake when years later he admitted to the actress Gertrude Kingston: "Lady Cicely no longer exist - if they ever did."

which many of the actors double or even triple parts, a fact which not only provides some possibly intended ironies (the corruption-purging police officer turning up as a pink-soaked porn-shop keeper) but serves to reinforce that in the eyes of history people have no characters, only roles. Despite Georgiadis's blurred discovery of his political self, one is left with an impression of individuals who, whatever their theoretical power, are cast in attitudes that external pressures compel. No single scheme of reference, no "control over people's perception", persists. The question indeed of who controls whom reverberates through the play. Does Edwards control Donohue or Donohue Edwards? Do the CID control the porn-peddlers or the porn-peddlers the CID? In a chilling scene an oil executive maintains a steady authority while a Cabinet minister, faced with the facts of his sanctimonious, vainly disguises moral and political impotence. Even Georgiadis's dubious commitment is only a reflex response to conditioning factors, rather than an act of independent resolve. A history play then, and not a political homily - if it is an axiom of politics that people change events and an axiom of history that events change them.

The RSC with Methuen have published a programme texts of *Our Friends in the North* (0 413 500 91 X), and of two other plays, *The Pit*, and *Doll's House* (0 413 51240 4) and *Money* (0 413 51240 1), at 90p each.

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commentary**Theatre of the metropolis**

Stephen Wall

Henry IV, Parts I and II
Barbican Theatre

The reputation of the Royal Shakespeare Company depends a good deal on the quality of its ensemble, and no plays in the canon need good ensemble more than the two parts of *Henry IV*. The dispersed nature of the action, with all its telling juxtapositions of high and low life, court and country, comedy and history, requires a large cast, most of whom have their moments. Such moments, sometimes small in themselves (like the dawn scene with the carters in Part I), are vital to the unprecedented breadth of national life that Shakespeare gives us the sense of in these astonishingly hospitable plays, and a company needs deep resources if it is to do them justice. It's a challenge that the RSC could be expected to rise to, and the idea of opening its new London base with *Henry IV* must have seemed attractive and even logical at this point in its history, given the recent success of the virtuosos *Nickelby*. There is also the encouragement of precedent, since the company's present Stratford home opened with both parts of *Henry IV* in 1932.

First impressions of the Barbican Theatre suggest that it is going to prove far more suitable for the performance of Shakespeare than the Stratford house in its various modifications has ever been. The auditorium is strongly ventral in feeling, the shallow circles conformed forward, and the consequent access to the actors unhindered by the massive proscenium, framing and diminishing what happens on stage, which is such an obstacle at Stratford. The logic of the house's structure has been effectively mirrored by John Napier's design for *Henry IV*, which matches its perpendicular quality by building three large, three-storey wooden galleries, which are trucked on and off stage with resounding speed and precision. These square towers, with their balconies, loggias, inner rooms, and window-grooves, provide a marvellous warren for the Eastcheap scenes. While Falstaff and Hal drink below, the action on the inner and upper levels suggests a busy quotidian life, the scale and detail of their activities not so elaborated as to detract from the main action, but greatly enriching our sense of its metropolitan context. Trevor Nunn's remarkable talent for thickly populated, energetically sustained stage life is satisfyingly demonstrated with this company's usual flair for the communal and the collective. Such in the text but actively enhances it. The long tavern scene in Part I, in which

Falstaff and Hal playfully anticipate later scenes of paternal rebuke, is one of those sequences which (like the mechanicals' play in the *Dream*) can hardly fail in the theatre, but it works even better than usual here because of various tasks to make a stage audience. You feel more strongly than usual that time is suspended; you feel more than ever Falstaff's wonderful power of making it appear to do so, the tavern scene of Part II is even more leisurely, allowing for further elaboration of business by the ensemble, culminating in a splendidly animated sequence when Falstaff chases Pistol



A works outing from "Bury Fell" for the Coronation celebrations in 1953, from the exhibition Family Albums, photographs from the albums of working people at Camerawork, Roman Road, London E2 until July 17.

up and down from one level to another. Pistol is intriguingly played by Mike Gwilym as a man in modern incoherence. These apparently spontaneous set-pieces of hue and cry exhilaratingly exhibit the company's discipline. The cast also set about the Battle of Shrewsbury at the end of Part I with great energy. The three houses are withdrawn completely to reveal an exciting depth of space with more actors in hand-to-hand conflict than has become used to in these days of stage economy, when two's a retinue and three's a crowd. The variety of the battle-scenes - as well as the Douglas's psychopathic battering of Sir Walter Blunt, Falstaff's jests and dallying, Hotspur's grandiose last words, Hal's generous generosity to his rival, Falstaff's shameless resurrection - come seamlessly together as an extended action in which flexibility of tone in no way saps sustained power. On this evidence, the Barbican effortlessly accommodates and large public events, and offers that mobility of scene and immediacy of effect that the great Globe itself must have had.

On the other hand there are times when Trevor Nunn seems over-eager to display his company's stamina. Before *Henry IV* himself is allowed to kick off with "So shaken as we are" and so on, we have an elaborate piece of inserted ceremonial - an effect echoed at the end of Part II when, instead of the Epilogue promising us the (never delivered) prospect of Falstaff in France, we are given another big production number celebrating Hal's coronation. During scene changes we tend to get sudden bursts of music and actors crossing the stage at speed, as if they had an urgent appointment in the wings opposite. At the beginning of Part II, Rumour is not "painted full of tongues"; his words are shared out among the whole company, cowed and carrying candles, like a coven going in for *sprechstimme*. Such gratuitous spasms of theatricality distract one from the continuity of political argument which emerged with more force and interest in some earlier, less greasy, RSC productions of these histories. The actors try hard; admiration suggested by Ian Holm in

especially in Part II, to state their lengthy recapitulations of public grievances with some passion, but it is uphill work in a climate which conditions the audience to expect a high level of physical slow play - even Falstaff's energies are running down, the King is dying, and Hal has little to do - and the instability of Nunn's style is more evident than in Part I.

But whatever the qualities of the cast as a whole, any production of *Henry IV* depends heavily on its Falstaff. It is a fat part for the right actor, and Joss Ackland makes much of it

the Stratford productions of the mid-1960s. But Murphy's signals are not of a subtle kind: his projection both physically and vocally is strong, and some will find it excessive. It is true that a high degree of self-consciousness and self-absorption is quite compatible with the character. It is one of those performances that sixth-formers in the audience may well identify with but which their middle-aged teachers will be irritated by. It must be said, however, that Gerard Murphy is not the new David Warner; for all its force, his Hal does not suggest an interesting and complex interior life.

As Hotspur, Timothy Dalton shares this Hal's tendency to fling himself about the stage, although the text gives him more justification. Again, youthful impetuosity is largely conveyed by physical restlessness, though with rather more charm. The emphasized immaturity of both characters does make a final and moving kind of sense in their encounter at Shrewsbury. The sheer exhaustion during their fight, the way it decimates from a grand chivalric confrontation to a boyish scrap, the way it is both grand and almost silly - these provide true and even brave moments. The two performances also help to bring out with valuable clarity the preoccupation in these plays with fathers (or crypto-fathers) and sons. The theme is underlined at one point by an interestingly contrived move which allows Falstaff and the King to exchange a long look of inter-paternal rivalry, with Hal standing by. The reconciliation between Hal and Henry IV forms the emotional climax of Part II, as it should. As the King, Patrick Stewart exclaims, "My son!" with a rapturous intensity which both moves us as the expression of a baffled parental love rewarded at last and also alerts us to the parallel between his situation and that of Northumberland's Hotspur's father. (Northumberland's griefs are nobly spoken, by Robert Edlison, thrillingly subtle in the new auditorium; he also doubles as a sweetly futile Shallow.) Another striking moment in Stewart's performance is the incipient hysteria of his realization that the prophecy of his death in Jerusalem really means that he will die, not in the Holy Land, but in the royal chamber so called. But other aspects of *Henry IV*'s life are treated more perfunctorily: the king's enviously sound slumbers of his subjects do not sufficiently convey the sense of a speech illustrates the enormous bias of this production towards local theatrical effect and the consequent lack of any searching analysis of the nature and cost of power. Nevertheless, much of the creative energy of both parts of *Henry IV* lies in their fascination with various kinds of irresponsibility - an energy which Trevor Nunn and his company vigorously tap and dispense. The opening of the Barbican Theatre is certainly a good event in the contemporary English theatre, and these performances are not unworthy of it.

Shakespeare's Craft (177pp. Southern Illinois University Press, £11.20, 0 8093 10147) edited with an introduction by Philip H. Highfill Jr. brings together eight lectures. Anne Barton looks at the social effects of public utterance in "Shakespeare's Roman World of Words"; Harry Levin demonstrates the thematic, theological and psychological importance of the porter's scene and the sleepwalking scene from *Macbeth*; Robert B. Heitman looks at "Shakespeare's Variations on Farce Style"; Eugene M. Waith assesses the appeal of ceremonial scenes to Tudor playwrights; Alvin B. Kernan characterizes Shakespeare's audience from the evidence of the plays within the plays; and Samuel Schoenbaum recounts his search for Shakespeare in documents and artifacts.

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Oxford University Press

Scumbling and fumbling

Frances Spalding

Adrian Stokes
Serpentine Gallery

"Fuzzy" was an epithet Adrian Stokes himself applied to his art. His muffled shapes, hesitant draughtsmanship and blurred chromatistics give to his paintings (which are on show until July 4) an obliquely comparable with that found in his writings. His canvases are gauche, unemphatic and domestic in scale. Their chief quality is a gentle luminosity. Only rarely do they depend for their coherence on line and shape: their form is created almost entirely through colour which is rarely pure, one hue being merged into the next or scumbled over another. The absence of any skill of hand means that Stokes's paintings do not seduce when seen close to; they require both distance and time for their resonance to emerge. Then slowly these apparently offhand, small pictures grow increasingly definite and firm.

Stokes began painting because no one else was producing the kind of work he thought ought to exist. This was in 1936. Though obviously indebted to Turner, Monet and Bonnard, his work was then a little outside any contemporary movement or style. In 1937 he joined the Euston Road School which, in its emphasis on restrained realism, made unadorned warfare on the baroque handwriting and muscular painterliness that Duncan Grant had made popular. Stokes, though in sympathy with the school, ignored its obsession with measurement and never learnt to draw. From the start his distinctly personal style owed less to contemporary culture than to his already well formulated aesthetic ideas.

His famous distinction between "carving" and "modelling" for him twin polarities running through the entire history of art — had been elaborated in *Quattro Cento* (1932) and *Stones of Rimini* (1935). It seems surprising that the man who based his aesthetic on a profound love of stone should then take up painting. But he justified his theories in relation to this discipline: in his subsequent book *Colour and Form* (1937). In this colour is seen to be the ideal medium for his carving conception; just as the sculptor explores the potential of stone, so the colourist elucidates the surface of the canvas and reveals its "otherness". A "modeller", on the other hand, does not keep the conception of the picture in such close relation with the material used; he or she merely applies colour to a landscape whereas a carver "discloses its face". Stokes himself always avoided extremes of light and shade, which are an aspect of "modelling", and talked of painting as "an augmentation upon the surface".

The qualities that he sought in his paintings are those which he admired in the relief of Agostino di Duccio, whom he upheld over the "modeller" Donatello. In Agostino's relief, surface consistency creates "steady disclosure"; there is no absence of rhythm and in its place a spatial

stillness, something simultaneous and undramatic. Likewise this exhibition has an unisistent evenness of tenor. The shapes, instead of being imposed on the canvas, seem to emerge from it. This trick is enhanced by Stokes's method of illuminating his still-lives, not from some separate light source, but as if from within. Shadow is registered not by tonal gradation but by changes of hue.

He was a sensitive if limited colourist. His love of near complementaries causes the same colour harmonies to recur. In the hanging of this show certain canvases have been grouped according to their colour key. Within the general mass small notes or threads of stronger hue catch the eye like the salmon pink veins in Verona marble which Stokes once described as "just a glitter, a confused warning". In his still-lives his use of blue serves a unifying role much like Cézanne's shadow paths. In his landscapes, it glows with a milky brightness and suggests dusk.

He favoured low light effects ("Overcast" is the title of one painting) because they are sympathetic to local colour. He observed that in the evening things seem to be self-lit and the diminution in tonal range gives equal emphasis to every part. It was precisely this kind of uniformity that he sought in his art — "something laid out and instantaneous which needs no exploration, something that is calm, clear and demarcated as a panorama in the evening light". But the light in his paintings is hazy and semi-mystical; it suggests a reminiscence of transient effects rather than direct observation. A quality he admired in Turner's art was the dissolving of actuality "in favour of a diffused light that took advantage of itself".

Landscape became for him a symbol of a psychological state. On his autobiographical book *Inside Out*, he uses landscape to describe experiences that relate to Melanie Klein's pre-oral theory of good and bad feelings: the Hyde Park of his childhood became "a destroyed and contaminated mother, Italy the rapid attempt to restore". The qualities of light and space that he admired in Italy are present in these paintings. They therefore confirm Stokes's belief that art grows out of the reparative drive. He seeks to integrate on the surface of the canvas not only the object it which he is looking but also the dual aspects of his psyche. His landscapes represent both an outward and inner scene.

Compared with his writings, these paintings lack descriptive brilliance. The poetic response to visual appearances seems muted; he fumbles after nuances which in his books are perceived and described with great subtlety. As a critic he often looked for those qualities that concerned him as a painter in the work of others; his writings on Turner, Cézanne and Monet witness the fertile relationship between the two arts. Like Roger Fry, Stokes suffers from the comparison of his work with that of the great names. He wrote about, yet on entering the Serpentine one meets with a subdued but assured radiance, a presentation of object and self in happy conjunction.

Anglo-Scandinavian York

Gwyn Jones

The Vikings In England
The Yorkshire Museum, York

The spring and summer Viking exhibition at York has the triple advantage of being the right exhibition in the right place at the right time. The right exhibition because the Vikings are "in" as never before; the right place because York is the right place for any exhibition featuring history, archaeology and art; and the right time because the large-scale excavations which follow the uncovering of Anglo-Scandinavian York in 1972 have now been more or less concluded, and the labours of the York Archaeological Trust and its Director Peter Addyman deserve this prompt regional welcome and national recognition.

They have unearthed 15,000 objects, part-objects, bits and pieces, the vast majority of them from the Coppergate-Castlegate-Ousegate-Pavement area, some 300 of which figure in the exhibition. And they have enriched and illustrated our documentary knowledge of the English-Danish-Norwegian-Jorvik by a revelation of its shape, texture and colour, from the Danish conquest of the 860-70s to the Norman conquest after 1066. During these two centuries, whether there was a Scandinavian king in Northumbria or not, there was a substantial Scandinavian population in and around York. Its size, geographical position, political vicissitudes, facilities for commerce and administration, its varieties of livelihood, have made it an ideal place to study the cross-fertilization and fusion of related yet separate cultures and the modes and methods of society in its Anglo-Scandinavian heyday.

Another advantage is the size of the exhibition, which has been tailored to fulfil its purpose whilst fitting its context. It is 700 objects strong, neatly gathered in a re-designed section of the Yorkshire Museum. The exhibits are grouped coherently, and for the most

part consecutively. We begin with the first savage Viking assaults followed by a useful "Look at the English", who look demonstrably on a higher level of culture than their attackers. Even so, various beautiful things from Denmark make their appearance, including the ceremonial silver-inlaid axe and decorated bronze harness-bow mounts from Mammen, replicas of the Jelling Cup and the "King Harald's Baptism" gilt panel from Tondrup in central Jutland. The often beautiful, always deadly armory of both nations abounds.

The land and the arts and practice of agriculture get a good showing. The pagan and Christian religions appear in marked confrontation, and few things more heavily underline the reality of York as a Northumbrian town than the generous representation of stone crosses, hogbacks, and other sculptures in stone from the area which reaches from Newcastle and Cross Canonby right down to Otley, Leeds and York. It is an eye-opener to trace how Viking artists adopted this English art-form, and to study the subsequent blending of two religions, their legends and mythologies. Thus, Wayland-Volund makes two appearances in Leeds, in one raping a princess, in the other attended by evangelists. The large cross in the churchyard at Gosforth sets a crucifixion scene amid the trappings of Ragnarok. This entire "Hammer and Cross" section is one for the connoisseur.

More easily assimilable and equally impressive is the substantial showing given to Cnut and his well-loved Winchester. Here young viewers are particularly taken with the large-scale model of Winchester's Old Minster in Cnut's time: those of us of riper years cogitate the shape of the royal nose in the contemporary "portrait" in the *Liber Vitae* of c 1031 (according to *Knytinga Saga* it was long, narrow, and slightly bent), and thereafter the noses of his sons as depicted in the *Encomium Emmae* (Cnut's widow). But the truly arresting manuscript pages in *The Vikings in England* are a double opening from the Stockolm mid-eighth-century *Codex Aureus*. This sumptuous copy of the Four Gospels carries on the margins of folio

eleven an inscription in Anglo-Saxon added in the mid-ninth century, telling how

I, Earl Alfrid, and Werberg my wife, have acquired this book from a heathen army with our true money, that is, with pure gold, and this we have done for the love of God and the good of our own soul, and because we are not willing that this book should remain any longer in heathen hands.

But books have their destinies no less than men, and seven hundred years after its redemption it was in Scandinavian hands again.

Among the 300 exhibits from York in metal, glass, jet and amber, wood, stone and leather, bone and ware, illustrations of dress, manufacture, trades and trading, home-life, toiletry, burial, diet, and northern coinage, one is outstanding. This is the reconstruction, by way of replica, of one of the tenth-century structures excavated at 16-22 Coppergate. The area contained houses and workshops built in rows, and an authoritative account of them must wait on further study. For the present we have an eminently sensible attempt to give "at least a broad idea of the building traditions of tenth-century York". The "house" was raised on a floor sunk one-and-a-half metres below the surrounding ground surface, and was of very strong construction, with powerful reversion walls, squared uprights to support them, and sometimes massive foundation beams. The entire structure to the preserved height of 1.8 metres was of oak. Whether there was an upper story, and the nature of the roofing, are among questions still receiving attention. But that an impressive demonstration of Norse building-techniques adapted to a local terrain awaits us appears certain.

The *Vikings in England* exhibition is a notable example of Anglo-Danish cooperation of all kinds at all levels. It was seen in Denmark last year, and at York will remain open till the end of September. There are plans for a permanent exhibition of a novel and exciting kind to be established at York in the near future.

Fifty years on : Góngora translated

The TLS of June 23, 1932 carried the following review by J. E. Trend of Edward Mervyn Wilson's *English translation of The Solitudes* of Don Luis de Góngora:

To have translated Góngora is a considerable achievement. Góngora's later poems have been abused rather than read; and the abuse has come from the very quarter in which lovers of poetry might have looked for help and guidance — from the professors and historians of Spanish literature. A translator, therefore, needs a considerable sense of scholarship of his own and must combine it with a delicate perception of the kind of English verse best suited to a poet who deliberately set himself to redeem his own language from a fatal fluency. Mr E. M. Wilson possesses both of these qualifications in a high degree.

Some of Góngora's poems were translated into English during the seventeenth century, almost in the lifetime of the poet. Thomas Stanley turned a few lines at the beginning of the "First Solitude" into pleasing rhymed couplets; while the renderings by Sir Richard Blackmore are so good that they have been taken for original English poems, and "The Kind of them, the sonnet 'A Rose', was included in the Oxford Book of English Verse". In the nineteenth century there were a few English translations of Góngora. One of the early ballads was translated by Lord Byron in his "Life of Lope de Vega" (1817), and early poems were published by Sir John Bowring and others. Then in the sixties came a two-volume life of Góngora with a large number of English translations, by Archdeacon Chilton. He attempted examples of the different styles, including a very free rendering of the "epiphany" "Góngora's" about "Polyphemeus". The "Life" was a prize-winning achievement, written as it was with none of the editorial document which

have only become available in modern times. It was not the first time that English admirers of a poet have been the pioneers, although when the poet becomes fashionable on the Continent the work of the pioneers is forgotten or neglected. The rediscovery of Góngora was the work of the French symbolists.

A poet so obscure, they felt, must be very beautiful. Verlaine decided to learn Spanish in order to translate him into French, but he seems never to have learned enough Spanish: even to read him. Verlaine put the last line of the "First Solitude" as the epigraph to one of his sonnets, the line — "beldad, amor campo de pluma," which Mr Wilson renders — "beauty, love, field of feathers for the wife of love." The French poet, he thinks, probably knew little more of Góngora than that single image; but Rubén Darío, as a Spanish-American and a poet, realized the value of the discovery and brought it to Spain. "His knowledge of Góngora was far from profound, but he contrived to draw attention to what, hitherto, had been condemned without being read." Since that time Góngora has been much read, and those who took the trouble to read did not condemn. The tercentenary of his death was celebrated by all the younger Spanish poets; Góngora, in fact, has been a source of inspiration to modern Spanish poets in something of the same way that Donne and his contemporaries were to a generation of poets in England. The recently published "Anthology of Spanish Poetry", 1915-31, edited by D. G. de la Cruz, is an eloquent witness to the importance of Góngora in the eyes of the men who are writing poetry in Spain today.

Góngora's main object was to tighten his Spanish verse, to give it greater density and concentration by the use of "epithets". His style, Góngora may be described as a

Latinization of syntax and vocabulary combined with a great elaboration and complication of metaphor. His neologisms (Mr Wilson finds) were not so daring as has often been supposed. He did not invent many new words, and most of his innovations had already been used by previous poets. What he did was to heap them together in an unprecedented manner. He also used well-established Spanish words with their original Latin meaning.

The syntactic liberties were more "tolerant" although examples of most of them can also be found in the works of previous poets. Invention is to be found in most poetry, but Góngora crowded his pages with them. The frequent allusion to Graeco-Roman mythology is also considered to be characteristic of Góngora. Such allusions are perhaps more frequent in Góngora than in other Renaissance poets, but are not so recondite as some critics would suppose. "I doubt [he adds] if there are any that do not come from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid."

Mr Wilson points out that in his use of metaphor Góngora resembles the English metaphysical poets: "even his very metaphors metaphorize themselves". A contemporary critic remarked: "Again, it is important to notice that Góngora is not at all the same thing as Euphuism. Spain had its *lunatic* of syntax and vocabulary, but Góngora was born, and a Góngorist could only appear at the end of a poetical epoch."

Some of the stylistic features of Euphuism may appear in Góngora, but the parallelism and antithesis, the use of those of Góngora are to be found in *Euphuism* — neither the Latinism of syntax and vocabulary, nor the metaphorical complications. Rather than Lily, Milton and Crashaw would seem to be English parallels (in their different ways) to Góngora.

Robin Hood

Sir, — May I break an author's self-denying ordinance to comment on two sources of possible misunderstanding in R. H. Hilton's riposte (June 11) to my *Robin Hood*? First, I regret that the misplacement of inverted commas has the effect of supplementing a quotation from Professor Hilton with some words of my own which do not, I think, misrepresent his views of 1958. Secondly, and more substantively, it is quite false to state that the argument of the book totally ignores the "rural yeoman", by which I presume him to mean the yeoman landholder as opposed to the household officer. A reader who turns to the index will be directed to an analysis of the social status of the yeoman and to a reasoned rejection of the hypothesis that the "rural yeoman" constituted the formative audience of the Robin Hood tales. Professor Hilton does not rebut this. He is, however, quite right on one point. I do indeed fail to mention any reference to the "rural yeoman" in the first fitte of the *Gest*, and for good reason: there is none. The word "yeoman" appears nine times in the first fitte. In two instances he is plainly imagined to be in service; in the other seven the word is used quite neutrally. I presume that Hilton has the following one of these in mind:

"But loke ye do no husbonde harme, That filch with his ploghe."
"No more ye shall go gode yeman, That Walcutt by grene-wode shawe; No no knyght be no knyght, That wol be a gode felawe."

If any special interpretation is to be thrust on the passage it should probably be that this yeoman was imagined to be a forester or ranger. But I hesitate to jump to conclusions.

The matter aptly illustrates a more general point. The book expresses no hostility to social historians, as Hilton asserts; it is, after all, a work of social history. It happens, in passing, to criticize specific views of some social historians. One feature of this is of considerable interest: there is plainly a gulf between the student of the ballads, with their largely northern background, and an expert on rural discontent, whose evidence is largely drawn from England south of Trent.

J. C. HOLT,
Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge.

Sir, — You quite understandably accepted only the minimum of corrections to the proof copy of my review of J. C. Holt's *Robin Hood*. If I may, I would like to add two small corrections which you were not able to allow in proof.

For the benefit of non-medievalists I wanted to indicate 1377 as the approximate date of Piers Plowman in which occurs the first reference to the Robin Hood ballads. More important, I wanted to correct a somewhat careless use of the word "uncertain" by substituting the word "uncertain" with reference to the use of the terms "yeoman" and "gentleman" before 1413.

R. H. HILTON,
School of History, University of Birmingham, PO Box 363, Birmingham.

The Ethics of Abortion

Sir, — While agreeing in some measure with L. W. Sumner (June 11) that the correspondence in your columns as to whether the human foetus is, or is not, parasitical in the scientific sense of the word has not greatly served to advance a discussion which is essentially concerned with moral issues, I would nevertheless argue that in any discussion of the ethics of abortion, the use of the word "parasite" should be avoided. For two reasons. First, because what is in question is strictly scientific, not moral, and implies a degree of moral turpitude on the part of the parasite. Secondly, because the parasitism of the foetus upon its mother is of a peculiar character, in that it is

a temporary condition, lasting for only nine months at most, and is moreover universal: all human beings are parasites at the beginning of their existence, and it seems hard to single out the unwanted foetus in this context. For these reasons I would suggest that the use of a word which can easily acquire an emotional connotation should be avoided. In its place I would recommend the phrase "an absolute dependent".

GERALD BONNER,
Department of Theology, University of Durham, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham.

'Against Criticism'

Sir, — I am extremely grateful to C. J. Rawson for his long and sympathetic review (June 11) of *Against Criticism*, but I hope he will not mind if I suggest that in one respect he illustrates my theme. He labels my position Romantic (also post-Romantic and neo-Romantic). By this token Herakleitos, Shakespeare, Goethe and the Taoist philosophers would also be Romantics, a portmanteau description I could hardly expect to escape; though my argument, which is laid out in full in the book, attempts to account for the problems with which all criticism — Romantic, neo-Romantic or not at all — is faced. Certainly it would be a pity if your readers were to identify me with the very critical tradition whose influence, as my discussion of Arnold shows, I believe to have led us astray.

The real problem is that by labelling my position, Professor Rawson effectively avoids the question of its truth. If it were universally accepted, there would be no need, as he implies, to defend it; but it is not. Views differ, and I have stated mine as clearly as possible. There must, however, be an answer to the argument advanced in my book, and I should prefer to know what it is.

IAIN MCILCHRIST,
All Souls College, Oxford.

'The Mathematical Experience'

Sir, — Gödel's first incompleteness theorem is one of the most profound results ever achieved about the scope and limits of formal logic. Since it is certainly possible that the philosophical significance of this theorem has not yet been fully appreciated, when as eminent a mathematician as Roger Penrose claims that it provides "the strongest argument yet made for Platonism" (May 14), such a claim would like to add two small corrections which you were not able to allow in proof.

According to Gödel's theorem, arithmetical truth cannot be identified with provability in any consistent formal system, for given any system, we can construct a sentence which we can prove both to be true and unprovable in that system. Thus anyone who wished to identify truth with formal provability has been dealt some rather bad news. But there are many forms of anti-Platonism that have never been interested in such an identification. To give just one example, the intuitionist L. E. J. Brouwer was denouncing both formal proofs and Platonism long before Gödel ever proved incompleteness.

It is not completely clear what position Penrose takes Gödel's theorem to be supporting since, no doubt due to the pressures of writing a concise review, he treats Platonism and mathematical realism as a single position. A realist is one who believes that mathematical sentences are true or false independently of human judgment; a Platonist is a realist who believes that mathematical statements are true or false in virtue of the existence of abstract objects, like numbers or sets, existing outside of space and time. Aristotle is an example of a realist who is not a Platonist; he believed that the truths of arithmetic and geometry were true independently of human judgment, yet denied that there were any abstract objects like numbers or triangles.

In his letter defending his claim

to the editor

(June 11), Roger Penrose says, "Like any other convincing mathematical argument, Gödel's proof helps to persuade us of the truth or falsehood of some clearly defined proposition — a truth or falsehood that it is evidently not up to us to decide but merely to discern" (my emphasis). First, Penrose seems to be conceding that there is nothing special about Gödel's proof, as opposed to any other convincing mathematical proof, that convinces one of Platonism. He seems to be saying that mathematical practice as a whole, rather than Gödel's proof in particular, convinces one of Platonism. This is an interesting and contentious claim that I cannot discuss here, but one relatively independent of the philosophical significance of Gödel's proof. Secondly, many legitimate anti-realists and anti-Platonists could agree with the quoted sentence. Though I have no particular interest in defending anti-realism, it is unfair to characterize an anti-realist as one who thinks it is up to us to decide the truth or falsity of a mathematical statement. An anti-realist may believe, for example, that mathematical statements are not true or false independently of human judgment because he thinks that mathematical truths depend in part on complex and deep facts about the structure of the human mind. Since the structure of the mind is not up to us, an anti-realist may deny that the truth or falsity of a mathematical statement is up to us to decide.

ROBERT VAS DIAS,
52 Cascade Avenue, London N10.

Public Lending Right

Sir, — The page requirements for PLR are slightly more complex than Joanna Troughton implies (Letters, June 4), and their results are likely to be even more bizarre. To be eligible for registration, a book must have at least thirty-two pages (or at least twenty literary magazines and small presses in Great Britain, which is that by publishing "unfamiliar, nonconformist, experimental and adventurous work" by them dooms themselves to an unsubsidized and therefore highly precarious existence.

Horowitz mentions *The Atlantic Review* (of which I was editor) among "the many other struggling international magazines and little presses" who have experienced a steadily worsening situation. Your readers may wish to be brought up to date regarding our struggles. After we were notified that the Anti-Corruption Centre for British Studies in London could no longer afford to publish the magazine, we applied both to the Arts Council and to the Greater London Arts Association and were turned down by both; our situation then worsened to the extent that we had to suspend

publication entirely. We finally had to go further afield — across the Channel in fact. Although I'm pleased to be able to report that the magazine is now being published by the American College in Paris as *Paris/Atlantic*, edited by Michael Lynch and myself, the lamentable fact is that we had to leave Britain in order to continue. I am, ruefully, bound to admit the apishness of Horowitz's warning that "the rivers of raw material 'at home' are that much more likely to stagnate, or dry up altogether", unless there is a change of attitude towards supporting innovative writing.

JOHNATHAN LEAR,
Clare College, Cambridge.

Subsidizing Magazines

Sir, — Michael Horowitz (Letters, June 11) eloquently — and correctly — expresses the central dilemma faced by literary magazines and small presses in Great Britain, which is that by publishing "unfamiliar, nonconformist, experimental and adventurous work" by them dooms themselves to an unsubsidized and therefore highly precarious existence.

The decision may well deny PLR to many writers and illustrators of both children's and adult books. A text of 5,000 words is enough to secure PLR for both the writer and the illustrator provided the page size is tiny enough (or the typeface large enough) to spread the text over thirty-two pages. Should the same text be printed on folio-sized pages or should it be

dispersed and march in step with predominant illustrations, then writer and illustrator are alike deprived of PLR.

It is hard to discern any principle in a rule that makes the claim to PLR of both writer and illustrator depend not on the work they put into the book but on the format the book gives to the writer's work.

BRIGID BROPHY,
MARK LE FANU,
WALTER J. JEFFREY,
Flat 3, 185 Old Brompton Road, London SW5.

Camels and Others

Sir, — Certainly there is no definitive text for the hedgehog poem, and I doubt if it is an "Oxford rhyme". The version I heard in youth, in a world where Christ Church was hardly distinguished from Christ's Hospital, ran:

Prolonged and exhaustive researches
By Darwin and Huxley and Ball
Have conclusively proved that the
hedgehog
Cannot be buggered at all.

Equally lengthy researches
Have incontrovertibly shown
That this comparative sexual immunity
is ensured to the hedgehog alone.

The penultimate line is a little shaky, but otherwise this seems to me a very fine text.

JULIAN SYMONS,
Croton House, 330 Dover Road, Walmers, Deal, Kent.

Sir, — In the early 1930s, college students on this side of the Atlantic used to try to make young ladies blush by reciting this version of the verses quoted in your issue of June 4:

Exhaustive experimentation
By Darwin and Huxley and Hall
Has conclusively shown that the hedgehog
Can hardly be buggered at all.

Still further experimentation
Has incontrovertibly shown
That comparative safety at Harvard
Is enjoyed by the hedgehog alone.

So here's to the boys up at Harvard,
And here's to the boys down at Yale
Who successfully buggered the hedgehog
By shaving the spines off its tail.

I have no idea which Hall is alluded to here. However, it should be noted that "hedgehog" in America means "porcupine", an even more forbidding subject.

JANET PHIPPS McGRATH,
"Good Earths", Briar Lane, PO Box 1083, Wellfleet, Maryland 02667.

Among this week's contributors

JOSEPH AGASSI is Professor of Philosophy at Boston University and at Tel-Aviv University. His most recent book is *Science and Society*, 1981.

MALCOLM BOWIE's books include *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult*, 1978.

HUGH BROGAN is the author of *Tocqueville*, 1973.

D. J. ENRIGHT is the editor of *The Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse 1945-1980*, 1980.

ROY FOSTER's *Lord Randolph Churchill: A Political Life* was published last year.

CHARLES FOX is co-author of the forthcoming *Ragtime to Swing*.

MARK GIBBOURD's most recent book is *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, 1981.

VICTORIA GLANDINNOG's biography of Edith Sitwell was published last year.

MICHAEL GRANT's books include *History of Rome*, 1978, and *The Etruscans*, 1980.

J. F. C. HARRISON is Professor of History at the University of Sussex. His books include *The Second Coming*, 1979.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS is *Washington Correspondent for The Nation*.

MICHAEL HOLROYD's books include *Augustus John*, 1974-75. He is at present working on a biography of Bernard Shaw.

DAVID JONES is Senior Lecturer in History at University College, Swansea.

GWYN JONES's books include a *History of the Vikings*, 1978.

PETER KRATING is the author of *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, 1971.

PAUL KENNEDY is Reader in History at the University of East Anglia and author of *The Realities Behind Diplomacy*, 1981.

PAUL LEVY is the author of *Moore: G. E. Moore and the Cambridge Apostles*, 1979.

MARIE MCDOON is a lecturer in Philosophy at the University of York.

J. R. MADRICK is a Fellow of Exeter College, Oxford.

MICHAEL MASON is a lecturer in English at University College London.

BRIAN MARTIN's *John Henry Newman: His Life and Work* was published last month.

HAROLD PERKINS is Professor of Social History at the University of Lancaster.

GRAHAM REYNOLDS's books include *A Concise History of Watercolour Painting*, 1972.

ROBERT SEAGER is the author of *Tiberius*, 1972.

BRIAN STOCK is the author of *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvestre*, 1973.

GRAHAM SWIFT's novels include *Shutout*, 1981.

ANTHONY THWAITE's most recent collection of poems is *Victorian Voices*, 1980.

D. F. WALKER is Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum. His books include *The Italian City Republics*, 1969.

STEPHEN WALL is a Fellow of Keble College, Oxford and editor of *Essays in Criticism*.

ENTERTAINMENTS

Adrian Stokes

1902-72 A retrospective
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Mercenaries of the cross

D. P. Waley

NORMAN HOUSLEY

The Italian Crusades: The Papal-Angelvin Alliance and the Crusades against Christian Lay Powers, 1234-1343

293pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £17.50. 0 19 821925 3

The subtitle of this work is a promising and challenging one. While the richly documented history of medieval Italy has in general not been neglected, the theme of the two rival parties, Guelphs and Ghibellines, certainly has been. Norman Housley would not claim that Guelphism is the topic of his book, but his treatment of the campaigns in Italy between the mid-thirteenth and mid-fourteenth centuries which were granted a reading status is so informative about the working of the papal-Angelvin alliance that it must be greeted as an outstanding contribution to the history of Guelphism.

What was Guelphism? It was much more than the aggregate of individual Guelphs. In one aspect it was a tradition, a historically-minded phenomenon, which as it grew older placed increasing emphasis on its origins in the foundation of Angelvin power in southern Italy. Thus a historical encyclopedia put together for a fifteenth-century Florentine Guelph family (British Library Additional MS 39615) contains the standard Florentine account (Villani's) of Charles of Anjou's conquest and the standard lives (Martin of Troppau's) of the popes who had ruled during the decades when Guelphism was founded. In a sense 1266 was to the Guelphs what 1689 was to the Whigs – and the imperial expeditions of Henry VII (1310-13) and Louis IV (1327-29) were the '15 and the '45 of the Ghibelline cause.

Guelphism, which was also an armed alliance and a party of those who had an interest in the outlawry of Ghibellinism, can only be understood through a knowledge of how it worked. Here Housley has much to contribute. He portrays Guelph diplomatic and military institutions in action and is at his best when describing the means whereby Guelph armies were gathered and financed. His chapter 'The

preaching and organization of the Italian crusades' is a particularly good one, while the lengthy treatment of the financing of these crusades excels in the clarity of its depiction of papal taxation. The diplomatic and financial crisis of 1265, when the focus of Guelphism came so near to abortion, is brilliantly narrated; it was the bankers, and the Church's success in handling them, that made possible the crucial military successes of Benevento and Tagliacozzo.

Dr Housley naturally sees as part of his subject the question whether the crusades in Italy against Christians were regarded, and should be regarded, as a deformation of the crusading idea, and he asks what people thought of such crusades and how they themselves. His treatment of these matters is of interest, but does not convince in the same way as the rest of the book. The crusade has been defined (by Hans Eberhard Mayer) as 'a war which is aimed at acquiring or preserving Christian dominion over the Sepulchre of Our Lord in Jerusalem'. But Housley will have none of this. He implies, truly enough, that the crusades against Christian powers arose inevitably from the nature of the Church. As an institution existing within and alongside the secular world, its functions, the Church could not hold back from diplomatic and military undertakings, while these in turn were bound to lead to claims to conduct not merely just but holy wars.

How much further than this it is possible to go? It can hardly be thought surprising that crusades against Christians – including Christians who supported the 'wrong' pope – have been seen as a 'deformation'. Remarks about the consequences of the Church's fundamental nature cannot settle difficult questions about the point at which comprehensible and logical lines of development may be said to undergo 'deformation'. It is hard to avoid the suspicion – however unfathomable the motives of those who volunteer for armies are bound to be, to themselves and others – that the ethos of those who took the cross to fight the Colonna or the Aragonese differed in important ways from that of those who had claimed 'God wills it' at Clermont in 1095. Dante complained of Boniface VIII that all

his enemies were Christians and none of them had been among the conquerors of Acre. Housley says truly of Dante that he had 'Ghibelline leanings', but it is much to the point to ask how and when he acquired them, since as a young man he had held very different beliefs.

The recruitment of crusaders was certainly effective, but here one is on difficult territory, because it is never possible to know how large a part was played by the spiritual inducement in the enlistment of these paid crusaders. Consequently it is also impossible to judge whether the recruitment of these armies can be truly portrayed as 'the response to the preaching' or if it is 1264-65 achieved an overwhelming success' and the care taken by the Curia to justify and preach the crusades was well rewarded? There were so many reasons why Frenchmen

should have been attracted by hopes of conquest in southern Italy in the 1260s, as Normans had been two centuries earlier. Young men in particular have often been attracted by such possibilities, while sometimes their families have been attracted on their behalf. In any case famine and demographic pressure were strong influences in the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth. The economic conditions of the time are neglected in this book. Housley tells us that Guelfism was 'able to reap a rich harvest of ideas and even of vocabulary from the use of the crusade' in its favour, but it was probably the other sort of harvest which decided the people of Italy whether or not to join up. Again, the author sees defeat as liable to discourage the faithful from crusading: this is true, but one cannot say whether such a consequence would follow because a defeated cause looked

less like God's cause or simply because success promises better material gains to the combatant.

In a sense the very excellence of the chapters on taxation and finance makes some of the contentions of the book superfluous. The more emphasis is given to the achievements of papal tax-collectors and Italian bankers, the less the argument is required that the participants in these campaigns joined because the war was a holy one. The brief 'general conclusions' on such themes tend to be couched in terms of 'it has yet to be proved', 'there is little evidence that', and 'there is no proof that'. This is symptomatic, and it would be best to conclude that this is a work which throws much light where illumination may be reasonably expected. Elsewhere, in the nature of things, it fails to throw light and some rash claims are made, but overall it is a very worthwhile book indeed.

The Gaelic frontier

J. R. Maddicott

ROBIN FRAME

English Lordship in Ireland 1318-1361

381pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £19.50. 0 19 822675 X

For much of the Middle Ages Ireland mattered little to English kings. Unlike the other provinces and states which lay on the periphery of their power, it was neither valuable nor dangerous enough to attract the intervention of the Crown. It lacked the fiscal and economic importance of Gascony; its stability of English politics as did those of the Welsh march; and it failed to produce a national leader to challenge the imperial claims of its overlord. Royal authority was too feeble. Irish society too poor and disinclined, to give birth to a Wallace or a Bruce. Between 1210 and 1394 Ireland remained unvisited by an English monarch, only outlying lordship to feel neither the force nor the favour which the king himself was best able to dispense.

In writing of English Ireland the

temptation is to give the country an unduly high place on the horizons of English kings; but it is a temptation that is easy to resist, and Robin Frame has not succumbed to it. His concern is not primarily with the role of Ireland in the English political world, but with the aspirations of the Anglo-Irish nobility and with the emergence of a distinctive political community, which grew both from those aspirations and from English mismanagement of what was in all senses a peripheral colony. The Anglo-Irish nobles faced peculiar difficulties. They wanted what most nobilities wanted in fourteenth-century Western Europe: privilege, light government, royal favour and the opportunities for advancement which arose from the social life of a royal court. They were the Crown's natural supporters, not its opponents, and they needed royal lordship. But, as the king's absence suggests, the monarch cared less for them than they did for the Dublin-based lord of an English lordship, whose circle was no substitute for a court and who often wielded the disciplinary powers of royal government without its powers of patronage. Unfamiliar with the powers of colonial society, the king over the water could easily give offence by backing the wrong men, by putting Englishmen into jobs traditionally reserved for the locals, by failing to recognize that aristocratic privilege in matters such as franchises might have more justification in Ireland than it had at home.

This essential otherness of Ireland was a factor which the English Crown was always prone to overlook. The import of English institutions did little to make Ireland into the dependency that Wales became after its conquest. Irish political society was only superficially shaped by the chancery and the law courts, and the chancery and the law courts, which made Dublin into a formative centre of the conditions of the warfare was constant, and negotiation part of the order of the day, there was an inevitable tendency for the colonists to go native: the importance of the noble lineage, stressed by Frame, was as much a result of Gaelic example as of the lack of alternative centres of power and security. Resentment against absentee lords, who took nothing from the country without defending it, gave cohesion to the emerging political community, while the decline of the absentee interest in the second half of the fourteenth century made that community more self-sufficient.

If the Anglo-Irish nobility has to be understood on its own terms, its activities nevertheless partly moved to the rhythms of English politics. In the disturbed decade of the 1320s the court of Roger Mortimer found their backers in Ireland as well as in England. The Anglo-Irish fought for Edward III in the 1330s and in France in the 1340s; and political upheavals in England, like the purge of the administration in 1340, were reflected in Irish affairs. For most of the

period the Crown made no financial profit from Ireland. But it remained a place where patronage might be dispensed, royal rights enforced, troops raised for service abroad, and Scottish expansionism countered. In a century of war, Ireland's contribution both to the Crown's resources and to its military strategy was far from negligible.

On this original subject Frame has written a perceptive and illuminating book, and one thoroughly grounded on chronicles and records. His sharp focus on the aspirations of the nobility and on their relationship with the English government gives the work a coherence and a unity which a more expansive history of Ireland would have lacked. Yet it carries with it one disadvantage in setting boundaries to the argument which seem at times to be over-rigid. Two subjects, both of them admittedly well studied elsewhere, are largely taken for granted here: the institutions of English Ireland and the development of Gaelic Ireland. Yet it is difficult to describe the growth of a noble community without giving some thought both to the Irish parliament, which brought that community together, and to the indigenous society whose impact helped to shape the community's attitude to the English monarchy.

Economic factors, too, deserve a larger place in the story. The sources of noble wealth, the effects of the Black Death, and the curious fluctuations in royal revenues from Ireland, are all subjects which are touched on lightly here and which leave unanswered questions. Does some more general economic crisis, for example, lie behind the unexplained and apparently precipitous fall in the Irish customs revenues between the reigns of Edward I and of his grandson?

But if there is room for a more comprehensive view of the world in which the Anglo-Irish nobility moved, Frame's book remains a most valuable addition to their history and to the growing stock of works on the dynamics of the English 'frontier states'. From now on Anglo-Irish society, at a period crucial to its development, ought no longer to lie beyond the pale.

Medieval Studies for J. A. W. Bennett, edited by P. L. Heyworth (275pp. Oxford University Press. £27.50. 0 19 812628 X) contains seventeen essays published to celebrate the contribution to medieval studies of the late Professor J. A. W. Bennett. The essays include: 'The Learned Advisor' by Dan Davis, 'Langland's Mezzo Del Cammin' by John Burrow, 'The Girl with Two Lovers: Four Canterbury Tales' by Helen Cooper, 'Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite*' by J. Norton-Smith, 'Or Editing the *Canterbury Tales*' by F. Blake, 'Observations on the *Text of Troilus*' by Derek Brewer, 'The Functionality of Middle English Texts' by P. L. Heyworth, 'Noct in the Regatta of Venice' by Gower, 'English Mirror for Princes' by M. A. Manzoni, 'Arbor Caritatis' by Peter Drucker, and 'Commoners and Kings: Book One of *Morp's Utopia*' by Emily Jones.

LITERARY CRITICISM

Rising against the Omnipotent

D. J. Enright

STELLA PURCE REWARD

The War in Heaven: Paradise Lost and the Tradition of Satan's Rebellion 315pp. Cornell University Press. £14. 0 8014 1138 6

Talking of God and the Devil – since we were made in the image of these beings, or they were made in ours, we should find no insuperable difficulty in understanding them. Given our course that we have some modest understanding of ourselves. Literature, as we know (or used to), is a great supplementary guide in these matters. Take, for example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* . . .

But not so fast! Remember, things cannot be understood without knowledge of other things. He who increases knowledge increases sorrow, but also derives enlightenment from it. The theory is innocuous, one would say, or even correct, or even obvious. In literary scholarship, however, it can be carried to ridiculous lengths, whether self-abasing or self-aggrandizing, whereby what is truly enlightening is darkened by what is merely informative. Backgrounds can obscure foregrounds.

Thus, to understand Satan's relationship to God, an understanding of Books V and VI of *Paradise Lost* is crucial. But to understand Books V and VI, it appears, a knowledge of no end of theological controversy is required, plus knowledge of the social and political background of the author's time, and of earlier literature on the war in Heaven.

Stella Purce Reward is intelligent, unself-regarding, deeply engaged, and enormously well informed – the war in Heaven, the remarks, ended after two days, whereas it has taken her two decades to write this book – but she is a notable and representative offender in the way indicated above. It would be asking for trouble to say, Look in thy heart and read. Yet even so, Milton wasn't exactly writing in cipher, or in shorthand, or in the *halku* type of wispiness which needs to have significance injected from outside.

'The first cause of the war in Heaven *Paradise Lost* is intellectual.' There is no cause to quarrel with that; though I am not convinced by Reward's distinction between defects of reason and defects of emotion: Satan's pride is both intellectual and emotional, like any other pride, and nicely caught in Coleridge's confounding phrase, 'lust of self'. But she continues, 'To understand Milton's use of pride . . . it is well to become intimately acquainted with' the 'long and complex theological tradition' which 'begins in Old Testament times and does not complete until the time of such later-day fathers as Anselm and Aquinas.' And this is only the beginning. Yet the fact remains (why call it *Paradise Lost* famous?) that it is Milton who makes something like flesh and blood out of the dry bones of the Fathers, and *Paradise Lost* that illuminates the patristic tradition rather than the other way about.

The central problem for Christians has always been to account for the existence of evil in a world created and run by a good and blameless God. The theory that evil entered the world as a result of angels lusting after human women sets the entry at a suspiciously late date (it also begs the question), though at least it involves the complexity of women, not of men. Satan's pride and envy make a more satisfactory cause: envy of the Son and his of men, both devoted over his head. In the impossible desire to rise, or the desire to rise however improperly, Satan chose to fall – and thus initiated evil. Thereafter man too chose to fall, with some encouragement; to this woman, then generally considered inferior to man in various major respects, and inclined to be sexually tempting (man doesn't tempt, he takes of man) lent herself. This rationale was favoured as constituting a defence against Manichaeism, which (as Reward regarded evil as an original and independent establishment and was thus liberal in derogating rather than questioning the omnipotence of

God. Moreover (speculation is free) it kept sex inside the human family.

Professor Reward rightly maintains that we should see Satan not merely as the originator of evil but also as the continuing manipulator and seducer.

'The master plot, laid down in Heaven, is archetype not only for the future plot in Eden, but for all plots. Plots of course are like treason: when they prosper they are not plots. But one takes the point; and *Paradise Lost* is by its nature full of archetypes. Reward refers us to one particular plot: readers of the poem will do well to remember that a 'Satanic conspiracy' was an event yearly recalled by seventeenth-century Englishmen'. True, that plot included some of the ingredients present in Satan's conspiracy, since it began in secrecy, was directed against a newly anointed king (of the Son), and resorted to gunpowder. Also it didn't come off. No doubt the Gunpowder Plot meant a lot to Milton. To us it means little – worse for Fawkes, or the Pope of Rome, or some king less desirable than James I or the Son, would be merely reductive: as exercises in 'relevance', however well-intentioned, often are. If anything, readers of *Paradise Lost* would do well to forget that conspiracy Englishmen and twentieth-century English children.

Though Reward argues her case well, I am not persuaded that the war in Heaven dominates *Paradise Lost* as the Trojan war dominates the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*, and that it was because Milton considered the war so important that 'he placed it at the very centre of his poem'. True, it is impossible to ascertain Milton's opinion on the point (and his intention is not what counts), but to put it this way is to make the poem sound like a chocolate. 'The war in Heaven', Reward asserts, 'is a real war.' That is exactly what it is not. In real war people get killed. The angels are equipped with real weapons, swords, arrows, shields, brazen chariots, and they can be really wounded – Moloch is cleft in twain – and feel pain. But their 'ethereal substance' quickly heals. They were made immortal and would have to be

unmade; as Milton has it, they 'cannot' but by annihilating die'. God could annihilate the rebel angels, but that would be tantamount to genocide, not war; and of course there are other reasons why it would not suit.

Professor Reward is right in saying that, though it involves supernatural participants, the war 'was meant to resemble and be the archetype for human war'. This is made explicit by Raphael, when he tells Adam and Eve that in time to come their intent on mischief may devise similar instruments (ie explosives) to plague their descendants; in an even grimmer prophecy he remarks, of the 'materials dark and crude, / Of spirituous and fiery spume' from which the rebel angels make their gunpowder, that the invention seemed easy, once found, 'which yet unfound most would have thought / Impossible'. If the war in Heaven hadn't been meant to bear in human import, Reward continues, 'Milton would never have employed recognizable earthly trappings of warfare . . .'. But what else could he employ? In describing the conflict Raphael tells his human listeners that in heaven by things on earth: the latter things are yet to be seen on earth, a fact which must have left Adam and Eve baffled, but not so the readers Milton is addressing.

The seraph Abdiel speaks true in warning Satan before the first blow is struck: 'Fool, not to think how vain / Against th' Omnipotent to rise in arms'. What must be, will be. It is characteristic of Satan's logic (and one of the things that endear him to us: we can understand him) that at the end of the first day of the war he should inform his followers – they are 'immortal' but still only one-third of the heavenly host – that since they have survived one day against God, 'why not eternal days?' And briefly it might look as if he is correct. The rebel angels invent gunpowder, build heavy artillery, and throw the loyal angels into confusion. Milton gives us to understand that the latter fall about because of the weight of their arms – possibly making the point that you should not put your trust in armour, or registering an objection to the machinery of epic warfare, or perhaps by way of making this particular war

more of a war and less of a walkover. Reward's commentary is crammed with references to medieval and especially Renaissance accounts of the war in Heaven to which Milton may or may not have been indebted (for example, we may be fairly sure that Milton had read poems like Alfano's *La guerra [battaglia?] celeste tra Michele e Lucifero* or Valvano's *Angeledi* or Peril's *La guerra angelica* . . .), and we are glad to hear that he was original in granting Satan this modicum of efficacy, this temporary victory.

Temporary it is, for the loyal angels retaliate by plucking up whole mountains and forests and dropping them on the cannons and on the enemy warriors. Reward proposes interestingly that Milton is consciously reducing the stature of the good angels: they too are damaging Heaven, helping to turn it into something 'the ethic of heroic battle' as found in Homer and attacking war in general. She suggests later that in Book VI Milton is out to 'limit severely the kind of heroic expansiveness he had earlier permitted Satan'. That may well be so, but what occurs to one is that the poetry of Book VI simply doesn't rival that of Books I and II: in any work, it is the best poetry that 'dominates', not that part of the subject matter which is theoretically of most importance.

Be that as it may – and I suspect Milton is more concerned to enliven the war by varying the tide of fortune than to reduce the stature of the actors for whatever reason – when the third day dawns, God reckons that enough is enough and brings the proceedings to an abrupt end by dispatching his son, as it were a super gunboat ('the finest example of creaturely heroism', says Reward), carrying 'ten thousand thunders', as it were nuclear missiles, which he only needs to use sparingly. The rebels, 'thunderstruck', put up no resistance and are driven into the bottomless pit. What is real about this, and of course to the point, is that, although the immediate issue was never in doubt, there is no final conclusion to the war. The rebels are dislodged, but live to fight another day, another way.

At the outset, in Book V, when

Adam commences his questioning, Raphael voices the embarrassment that Milton must have felt:

High matter thou enjoin'st me, O prime of men,
Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate
To human sense th' invisible exploits
Of warring Spirits . . . ?

The thing is done as well as it could be, and Milton has built in his apocryphal and warnings. One good end is the striking figure of Abdiel, to whom Reward draws our attention: his confrontation with Satan is life-like, like (that is) the wars of words followed by blows between Homeric heroes (Milton surely couldn't have wanted to avoid all similarity with the epic) or indeed between modern statesmen.

But it is not surprising that Book VI has occupied readers less than other parts of the work: they know from Book I that the field was lost, albeit Satan believes he has shaken the Almighty's throne. Remarkably on the incongruity resulting from this confusion of spirit and matter which pervades the whole narration. Johnson added that it was, he gathered, 'the favourite of children, and gradually neglected as knowledge is increased'. It is foolishly of Reward to claim that 'Had Dr Johnson read the epic of the celestial epics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he would hardly have been surprised at the ease with which Milton's spiritual angels adopt material arms'. Dr Johnson would have had read, for he never supposed that error, impropriety or incongruity could be excused or justified by the adduction of ancient precedents.

Northrop Frye has commented that, since the angels have no strength that does not come from God and the devils have no strength against God, 'it is difficult not to feel that the entire war in Heaven is a huge practical joke to the Father, all the more of one because of the seriousness with which the devils take it.' The Father can laugh over its exalting irony, but we may be inclined to, seeing ourselves ('relevance' can't always be ignored) as the gallant little Belgium or Falkland Islands of the story. Nor shall we all share Addison's pious dew that finally Satan is shown as 'assemble in the heights of his triumph' and Adam as 'triumphant in the heights of his misery'.

Perhaps then, as 'real war', we had better leave the story to children. Adults can read it as allegory (somewhat supererogatory in that it is the effects of Satan's expulsion that concern us rather than its mechanics, and his 'nature' is conveyed more potently in Books I and II than in V and VI), not finding an explanation of why things are as they are – that vexed question of how a good God can allow evil so much leeway – but an illustration of what they are or may be.

Professor Reward has the benefit of a subject that fascinates even in the midst of boredom: some of those dry patristic bones still have life in them. She raises important questions, whether or not one always agrees with her answers – some of which seem to me to have a rose-coloured glow about them. And she offers a new reading, as when pointing out that though the prelapsarian Satan isn't shown in *Paradise Lost* ('never do we even see him in the throes of conflict'), we see the prelapsarian Adam, in Book IV, in much the same situation and condition as Satan before his fall: 'perfect, pre-eminent, exercising great command and sway, yet required to obey God'. Similarly, she brings out the hardly-inadvertent parallel between Satan whispering at Eve's ear, 'Why sleepest thou, Eve?', and Satan reported by Raphael to Beelzebub, later as whispering to Beelzebub, 'Why sleepest thou, Eve?', and Satan reported by Raphael to Beelzebub, 'Why sleepest thou, Eve?' (by which 'all seemed well pleased, as seemed, but were not all'). 'Sleepst thou, companion dear?' – a lesson lost on Eve.

And, as the blurb foretells, this book should appeal to students of the history of ideas, and of course of comparative literature. If only, on occasion, literature could be allowed to

Matrimonial mockery

Brian Stock

JACQUES LE GOFF and J. C. SCAMMAY (Editors)

Le Charivari 444pp. The Hague: Mouton.

In April, 1977, some sixty historians, folklorists, anthropologists and students of literature met at the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, Paris, with the general objective of comparing research notes on the charivari in ancient, medieval and modern European society, as well as in some other cultures. The results, J. C. Scammay modestly notes, raise many problems as they solve, but they are rich in ethnographic surveys as well as in reflections on the limits of interdependence between historical and anthropological modes of thought. A charivari is defined by the OED as 'a raucous, noisy, and often obscene, dance, song, or play, used in France in derision of incongruous marriages'. The charivari was condemned at Lyons as early as 1321, and was made the subject of serious reform legislation between 1640 and 1690. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, however, André Bouché, the major champion of ecclesiastical authority was not about ecclesiastical authority, or at least not about the validity of marriage, which, although often unbinding different couples, were considered perfectly legitimate by theologians.

But was that all? The charivari, drawing on a wide range of English

evidence, queried the link between the often thinly suppressed violence of the charivari and the narrow framework of matrimony championed by French folklorists like P. Fortier-Beaulieu. What we perhaps too loosely call the charivari appeared to be related to a variety of local, political, or generational conflicts. Thompson Zemon Davis, who had drawn attention to the appearance in youth groups in which the atmosphere of carnival and the spirit of unreason combined, with the result that tensions of socialization affecting marginalized young people were effectively reduced.

These studies continue to broaden the horizon of the charivari to include such activities as the *marivari*, a youth group observed by C. Robert and M. Vallère in the Hautault, the Romanian *marivari*, or village street-orchestra, and the Italian equivalent of the charivari, the *marivari*, which receives a painting by G. Knapich-Zabot. In the charivari, the function spilled over into anti-German sentiment in 1942, while in the Hautault, Spain, as recorded by C. Robert, the charivari was a religious symbol, predicated continuously from the Middle Ages to the present. Germanic reminiscences of the charivari have also been observed in societies as widely separated as those of Morocco, New Guinea and West Africa.

The major anthropological influence on these essays is Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose well-known analysis of the charivari in *Le mariage et la parenté* was a point of departure for many

contributors. Yet his ideas are approached with a great deal of flexibility. While Nicole Belmont, for instance, stresses the importance of his notion of ritual as 'paralanguage', most authors agree that the charivari contains not a single but a multiple encoded message. Clarr Gallini, in discussing the present-day rite of *sa corradale* in Sardinia, parts company with Lévi-Strauss's interpretation of ritual noise-making, which, as she puts it, wrongly assimilates the comic to the social, thus incorrectly deriving the latter from the former. Yet Martine Grinberg, in reviewing charivari during the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, agrees with him about the ritual's conciliatory nature, and even so empirically oriented a historian as Martin Ingram finds some resonance in the notion of elemental opposites. Other anthropological notions, such as 'ritual' and 'paralanguage', are subjected to a critique by folklorists like Claude Knapich-Zabot, who, in the case of the wide-ranging reports of Sylvie Pattegon on Byzantine youth groups or Richard Tiedler on *travesti* and *quintetto* Florence.

Carle Ginzburg perhaps best sums up the volume's theoretical dimensions when he speaks of a possible dialogue between the anthropological approach, emphasizing form, and the historical, emphasizing function. Ginzburg's own paper, which rings of the eleventh century, to the Renaissance, is a study of a type of historical writing which, not only 'describes' events but also 'reconstructs' them in a modern building on its own

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Petition

Lady, the leaves are catching fire in the avenue
the wattle fences around the estate is in need of repair
the stags have done their belling, the hinds are three months in calf
and I am not so young as I was. Man and boy
I have lived in this country cloister, this fair park
with its great house of Tudor chimneys and colonnades
where I have wiped my boots and made my prompt report
of deer, of poachers apprehended, of sicklers lopped
of branches angled from the pond before the east
windows, and beside the house the darling church
topped with a spire you can see for miles that seems to tug it
heavenward, its nave no longer than its transepts, windows
whose tracery of leaf shapes these six hundred years
has writhed and wrestled in the pentecostal gale
its fine stone floor I sweep, keeping the commandments
always, and twice on Sunday and twice more during the week
lighting forty-seven candles, laying out vestments, finding
the place in the book, pulling the bell, pumping the organ:
WHEREAS your sweet self has visited me, stopping over
my threshold at the gate, brought into my room such light
as I had never dreamed the multitude of cobwebs
nor guessed the wealth of dust my dutiful years have gathered
whereas the fragrance of your tall and cheerful progress
has gusted through the trees I hold in trust, whose many
colours I had mistaken for my early autumn
until they flared before your laughter, but did not fail
whereas you have expressed concern at the state of the fence
not for my lord's sake but for mine, whereas you know
a time from a royal like no other woman, I have met
whereas the man I am is belling as never before
WHEREFORE be pleased to accept my honourable services
vegetables, fruit and nuts from my small garden, hares
shot as they nibbled my lord's fence, whose ancestor
would poach the German king by running him hard at the hunt
wherefore know that I who am neither lord nor poacher
hunt the deer You, my lips purged to summon the grunts
hounds of my earnest wishes, their paining calendar
ended, but in no wise chilled by your own more temperate seasons,
GIVEN at my hand this day, your birthday. My compliments
to your brother who knows his letters better than I.

Keith Bosley

Dabblers in literature

Peter Keating

JOANNE SHATTOCK and MICHAEL WOLFF (Editors)

The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings
400pp. Leicester University Press. £28.
0 8020 2463 7

For many late Victorian commentators, looking back on a century of bewildering social change and trying to make sense of it, the growth and influence of the periodical press stood out as a major feature. George Saintsbury argued that the expansion of "periodical literature" was even more characteristic of the age than "the enormous popularisation and multiplication of the novel". T. H. S. Escott, making much the same general point, saw Britain as a country full of men and women eager to turn their thoughts into print: "Most moderately well-educated people nowadays are actual or potential authors. They have dabbled in literature for purposes of pleasure or profit, they have published a book, or they have written magazine or newspaper articles."

Modern scholars have followed their Victorian counterparts in acknowledging the centrality of Victorian periodicals and newspapers to any understanding of the age: virtually all serious studies of Victorian Britain draw extensively on the press for documentation, and many popular studies are little more than anthologies of material taken from the periodicals. The press as a subject in its own right has, however, received less attention. There are some wide-ranging surveys, a few excellent studies of the reading public (seen mainly in relation to particular types of periodical), and a fairly large number of monographs on individual papers and editors. Even so, it is no doubt true, as Joanne Shattock and Michael Wolff point out in their introduction to *The Victorian Periodical*

Press, that the "systematic and general study of the press has hardly begun". The sub-title of their book has been carefully chosen to reinforce this belief. What they offer are "samplings and soundings", fourteen exploratory essays by different writers, stages towards an eventual full-scale, inclusive study.

There is something audacious about even contemplating that ultimate goal. The difficulties involved were outlined by Walter Houghton in the first volume of his pioneering *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals* which was published in 1966, and they still sound daunting. For a start, nobody appears to know how many items make up the Victorian press. In his contribution to the present book Houghton fixes the figure at "over 25,000 journals of all kinds including newspapers", but as obscure Victorian publications continue to be unearthed that total could be conservative. Shattock and Wolff, with the unshamed romanticism that characterizes their approach, refer to "tens of millions of serial articles out there whose allure we dare not admit". Even if a reliable total could be established, there would still remain problems of identifying long-forgotten editors, journalists, publishers and printers, as well as trying to clarify how such journals were financed, who owned and who read them.

Houghton's solution to these apparently insoluble problems has been to concentrate attention on those periodicals which are usually regarded as having exerted most influence on the opinions of the "articulate classes". It is a sensible, perhaps necessary, type of compromise. Shattock and Wolff admit that the "sheer bulk and range of the Victorian periodical press seem to make it so unwieldy as to defy systematic and general study", but it is the qualifying "seem" that catches the eye and indicates the ambition underlying this book. Their ideal is a history of the Victorian press "in all its constituent parts", and that means national and provincial newspapers, quarterlies,

reviews, weeklies, specialist journals, even comics. In this area of study the basic terminology is so vague as to make it difficult to be sure one is correct when referring to a magazine, a journal, or a review, and in the context envisioned by Shattock and Wolff the word "press" would seem to indicate any printed text published in serial form, for whatever length of time and of whatever quality, excluding only books. Whether a project based on so inclusive a definition can ever be manageable is for the future to justify. Immediately, the essays collected in *The Victorian Periodical Press* are valuable both as case studies and for the ways in which they chart the various areas of study that would need to be explored fully in any overall view.

The Victorian Periodical Press is divided into three sections. "The Critic as Journalist", "Management and Money", and "The New Readership", though the individual essays constantly raise questions - of circulation and readership and thematic links. In spite of this, a fairly fundamental distinction can be made between those essays in which the centre of interest is the periodical itself (its organization, editorial policy, funding, or characteristic content and readership), and those in which the principal interest lies outside the periodical, in a major author's use of this form of publishing or in the kinds of concern that are reflected or propagated by periodicals. At least half of the essays come into this second category.

The most direct instances are Brian Maidment's study of Ruskin's use of the periodical press to capture new kinds of readers; Ann and John Robinson on John Stuart Mill's various excursions into journalism; Helene Roberts on the treatment by the mid-Victorian press of art exhibitions; and John Woolford's demonstration that during the 1850s we can observe in the periodicals important changes taking place in the role of the literary critic. All of these essays could be placed just as appropriately in other contexts, as

also, with stronger qualifications, could some of the wider-ranging contributions. Brian Harrison, for example, on the development of periodicals to support specific reform movements, notably temperance and feminism; Aled Jones's fascinating revelation that in the 1870s there was a concerted attempt to set up a provincial newspaper network to express a radical working-class point of view; and Donald Gray's researches into the equally fascinating, but murkier, regions of early Victorian scandalous journalism.

Louis James on the *Servant's Magazine* and Michael Wolff on the *British Controversialist* and *Impartial Inquirer* form useful bridges to these contributors whose concern is primarily with questions of management and organization. Joanne Shattock's impressive unravelling of the in-fighting that surrounded the control of the *North British Review*; Sheila Rosenberg on John Chapman's desperate attempts to keep the *Westminster Review* financially solvent; Maurice Milne on the rise and decline of Sunderland's flourishing newspapers at the turn-of-the-century; and Scott Bennett's "Revolutions in Thought" which claims modestly to "attempt nothing but to open discussion of the commercial side of mass market publishing" and develops into a convincing argument that the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge can be considered the founders of the mass-market periodical in Britain.

One of the outstanding strengths of *The Victorian Periodical Press* is its demonstration that virtually no area of Victorian life was uninfluenced by, or impervious to, the power of the press: it is the ubiquity of the press that makes it simultaneously such an awkward subject to grasp and an integral part of so many areas of study. Brian Maidment points out that the magisterial Cook and Wedderburn edition of Ruskin's works has served to bolster the common twentieth-century belief that a writer produces books or volumes, whereas familiarity with Ruskin's varied modes of publication reveals a complex reliance on serial and periodical forms which can affect in subtle ways how we read those stately volumes (or, indeed, the pocket editions) that eventually emerged. The similar case of Matthew Arnold has long been understood, and also applies to many other Victorian writers whose "books" would, in the words of George Saltabury, "never have appeared as salubrious at all, if it had not been for the periodical press."

One important motive behind that movement from periodical to book publication was the desire by writers to escape the limited readership of the periodicals. It is obviously the case that many people read periodicals without buying their own copies, but still, circulation figures show that most of the periodicals reached relatively few readers. At mid-century, the long-established *Quarterly and Edinburgh* reviews had sales figures of about 8,000, while the radical *Westminster* and the Free Church *North British* survived uneasily on circulations of approximately 1,500. At its most suc-

cessful moments a scandal and gossip magazine like *Renton Nicholson's The Town* could sell 8,000 copies per week, while the monthly *Servant's Magazine* made do with 4,000 and the intensely serious *British Controversialist* sold about 2,000.

There were some notable exceptions to this general trend among the reform periodicals discussed by Brian Harrison, the most spectacular example being the *Band of Hope Review* which in 1861 could boast a weekly circulation of 250,000. Only the *Penny Magazine* among the periodicals aimed at a general readership could even dream of reaching such a huge audience, and then it did so only for a very short time. The true significance of the *Penny Magazine*, however, is that the attempt by Charles Knight and the SDUK to establish a mass-market was conscious and calculated. The experiment failed, but it was to be revived with greater success later in the century by a quite different breed of publishers and editors.

Circulation figures considered by themselves have only a limited interest: it is the living people they stand in place of that matter, and identifying them is clearly what Scott Bennett describes as "one of the most intractable problems in studies of periodical literature". Evidence about the financial backers of periodicals or the wage rates paid to different groups of printers and journalists may be hidden away, but, as the essays here show, it can be uncovered. Bringing to life the people who read, enjoyed or hated these various publications, must necessarily involve more conjectural methods. Even the specialist journals really tell us immediately only that the readers shared a specialist interest: in other respects they might well have had little in common. As one way of reaching through to the values and attitudes of readers, Louis James suggests that we should approach periodicals in much the same way as the literary critic analyses a novel or poem, by accepting that each publication is a "microcosm, to a lesser or greater extent, of a cultural outlook", and drawing our conclusions not only directly from content but indirectly from format which is itself "a form of communication". Michael Wolff is clearly sympathetic to this approach, and his essay on *The British Controversialist* is, like James's on the *Servant's Magazine*, a skilful attempt to define just one segment of that elusive Victorian reading public.

But a segment it is and a segment it remains, heightening once more the difficulty of moving from specific case studies to an overall view. In this respect the comparison between the history of periodicals and the literary critic could provide a salutary lesson as well as a useful method. That particular kind of critic at least got trapped in the text and couldn't get out. It would be sad if the Victorian periodical should come to exercise a similar disabling temptation. *The Victorian Periodical Press* is not entirely free of that danger, but it does also offer an impressive range of escape routes.

Actively authoring

Brian Martin

Philip Fisher
Making Up Society: The Novels of George Eliot
244pp. University of Pittsburgh Press.
£13.
0 8229 2800 6

Philip Fisher's thesis is that George Eliot shifted from writing social novels to making up social fictions. In what Fisher calls her "triumphant phase" she wrote three novels, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*, based on society as she saw it. *Middlemarch* he regards as her "single great social fiction", in which both author and characters combine in the process of "making up" the book. As Fisher writes in his own peculiar style of word-juggling: "Individual author, one another, and authorize: one another's text."

relation to the history of the novel as a literary form, and comparisons are made with the techniques of both James and Joyce. The fate of the self and the fate of society lay at the heart of the novel, as Eliot's novels are an attempt to find a new expression for both individual and society.

Eliot herself had her own problems in finding expressible identity: first Mary Ann Evans, then Marian, then Marian Lewes, then George Eliot, and then back to Mary Ann adding her legal husband's surname, Cross. Such was her difficulty in placing herself within contemporary English society. Fisher's discussion is no doubt important to many students of the novel but tedious to read. It is a pity he wraps up his arguments in language as convoluted as that of the texts he is discussing. Too often when he says "the novel is the genre at that he says 'conformity'. Lamb's advice to Coleridge would not go amiss: 'Cultivate simplicity.'

Beating the block

Antonia Phillips

ENRIQUE HANK LOPEZ
Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter
326pp. Boston: Little, Brown. £8.95.
0 316 33199 5

Katherine Anne Porter lived a life of self-imposed wandering, of endless removals and rented rooms (she travelled light: two embattled suitcases stuffed with manuscripts, notebooks and dresses) as she crisscrossed the United States, Mexico and Europe. Until her seventies, when the best-selling *Ship of Fools* and a Pulitzer prize for her *Collected Stories* brought her financial reward, she lived "forever on the barest of margins". In *Conversations with Katherine Anne Porter*, Enrique Hank Lopez presents us with a digest of tape-recorded conversations he had with Porter during the last two decades of her life, supplemented with material from her stories.

She was born in Texas into a large, long-established family, a writer's family - she may have exaggerated past properties - had tumbled since the Civil War: "I am the grandchild of a lost war, I have blood-knowledge of what life can be in a defeated country on the bare bones of privation." In conversation she reveals and Southern pride and an ache for antebellum lavishness; but there is also a pioneer toughness and realism that must have sustained her throughout her life. The myths and mystique of both her Southern and ancestral past furnished her with the material for many of her stories - which are not surprisingly perhaps, sentimental eulogies. (A certain amount of romanticism about the "Old South" is forgivable: if an epoch and place can be so romantic, the Old South is.) Rather, her stories probe a painful territory in which personal experience collides with that mythology and mystique.

The facts of her early life are vague - indeed, as much as a desire to conceal her true age as to faulty memory. The youngest of four and motherless from infancy, she was brought up by a demanding father and indomitable grandmother. Her childhood combined the deprivations of convent life (although most of her immediate family seems to have been variously Protestant) and great freedom at home, with visits to racetracks (betting allowed), theatres and shooting galleries; more importantly, there was total freedom in the choice of reading-matter, which early included Balzac, Montaigne, Flaubert and *Wuthering Heights*. She cut herself off from family and safety by a secret, and unconsummated, marriage at sixteen; which was followed - and instantly realized her unpreparedness for it - by fitful decades of scraping a living by journalism, hack-writing, ghosting film-extra work; as a singer of Scottish ballads, and as a ballet teacher in Mexico (squeezing it in between small revolutionary errands).

Later she wrote scripts in Hollywood, and taught literature and writing on exhausting university stints. Drifting around Texas, then north to Chicago, and west to Colorado (where she almost died of influenza - ill-health shadowed her throughout her life), she eventually landed in Greenwich Village.

Her long life (1890-1980) had its moments of excitement: revolutionary Mexico; the Paris of Joyce, Hemingway and Gertrude Stein; Berlin in the 1930s (her meeting with Lopez's book that arouses scepticism, and the conviction that Katherine Anne Porter was not only a self-mythologizer too sophisticated for her interviewer). And, of course, there were many American literary friends. But there were also despair and dreariness, self-doubt and guilty sense of failure. *Ship of Fools* was notorious for being taken twenty years to finish - the thought of it gave Flannery O'Connor nightmares; Porter suffered from a writer's block so chronic that she wondered at the toughness of a spirit who in those circumstances, to produce the writing of fiction, as it

chief priority. Plagued by publishers to produce more, and to produce a novel, she simply could not - except in "her own time". There were many fallow years, including ones with Guggenheim and Yaddo fellowships; long months of complete solitude, while she struggled to write; and sudden creative stints: the story that made her reputation, "Flowering Judas", she claims to have written in five hours. Three short novels, *Old Mortality*, *Pale Horse*, *Pale Rider* and *Noon Wine* (a story about the intrusiveness of evil as devastating as any by Flannery O'Connor), were apparently written in seven days each, within the space of a few months. When she did write, her first drafts tended to be final; but before that, the stories would churn around inside her for years. Nor could she write when married, as she was twice more, to much younger men. She bolted from both these marriages: the loss of privacy and independence was not made tolerable by the security they offered. Even the ownership of her first house, when she was over fifty, was too confining, and it was abandoned after thirteen months.

Lopez's book cannot fail to be a little interesting, since Katherine Anne Porter was an intriguing literary figure, a Southern writer whose place, if not exactly alongside Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, is at least close by. But one's sense of what he was like is all but obliterated by Lopez's often simple-minded, cliché-ridden and pompous comments - there is an embarrassing piece of armchair psychoanalysis about Porter's compulsive restlessness. His cloying reverence heightens our feeling of her determination to let others know her only under certain chosen aspects rather than as she really was. There may have been a Blanche Dubois lurking in her. It is frustrating to be provided with so few dates and facts, and not to know how closely Lopez's indirect reports follow what Porter actually said to him. When we do have the benefit of both quotation and reported speech, the discrepancy of tone is unnerving. Consequently, one would be happier with what can be gleaned from her stories themselves, particularly those stories and short novels featuring Miranda - in Spanish, "the seeing one". But her *Collected Stories* is not in print in England.

The germination process

Lachlan Mackinnon

ALAN BURNS and CHARLES SUGNET
The Imagination on Trial: British and American writers discuss their working methods
170pp. Allison and Busby. £8.95 (paperback). £13.95.
0 85031 383 X

The title of this book of interviews and more public question-and-answer sessions with writers of fiction is taken from Wilson Harris, who says "If the imagination is on trial, then I don't see why imaginative writers whose life depends on the imagination should not speak occasionally, rather than run away. Writers have this definitive task of 'No, I don't ask about my own work.' I think this is one time when it's valid to say something." Pressed to elucidate, Harris explains that what he means is that "there's an enormous necessity, something crying out from the depth of life, to relate in various ways to the objective world." He feels a humanistic requirement to make strange the apparently objective world of institutions, a requirement voiced in different ways by many of the writers interviewed (J. G. Ballard, Eva Figue, John Gardner, John Hawkes, B. S. Johnson, Tom Mallin, Michael Moorcock, Grace Paley, Michael Red, Alan Sillitoe and Alan Burns). As Charles Sugnet says in his introduction: "There is a great deal of the writer's block so chronic that the writers at the toughest of a spirit who in those circumstances, to produce the writing of fiction, as it

Between the books

Paul Levy

ANNE OLIVIER BELL and ANDREW McNEILLIE (Editors)
The Diary of Virginia Woolf: Volume IV 1931-1935
416pp. The Hogarth Press. £15.
0 7012 0467 2

How wrong we get Virginia Woolf, and what a lot of nonsense is written (and spoken) about her by her admirers as well as her detractors. Now that her letters are in print and the penultimate volume of her diaries is published, we are in a position to know as much about her as about almost any literary figure in history. Yet people persist in praising or damning her for the stranger reasons. The present volume of diaries covers a period in which Mrs Woolf enjoyed mental stability. A right reading of the passages in them that refer to her earlier bouts of instability gives the lie to those recent books and articles that claim, for example, that she was never mad, or that she was somehow mistreated by her husband. She, at least, was quite clear about the nature of her earlier illnesses.

Certainly Virginia Woolf was a remarkable person; but much less remarkable, on the evidence of her diaries, than she appears to those who see her as a monster of selfishness and snobishness, or as a wilful creator of literary obscurity. In the years 1931 to 1935, at least, her preoccupations were similar to those of most people of her background and calling. In the first place, domestic life with its pleasures and its cares. In second place, her writing. These were the years of *The Waves* (the agonizingly slow progress and surprising commercial success of which Leonard Woolf included in his expurgated version of the diaries), *The Years*, *Flush* and *The Common Reader* (Second Series).

Social life occupied the third place in Virginia Woolf's hierarchy of concerns in this period. It might very well have been even more important, for in these years she lost two of her greatest friends, Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry, and a third, younger one, Francis Birrell. Deeply affected by Strachey's death - there are dozens of entries about it - she none the less anticipated

Carrington's response to it with ominously cool rationality. "She says she will kill herself - quite reasonably - but better to wait until the first shock is over and see. Suicide seems to me quite sensible."

In the fourth place, these diaries record her thoughts and views about politics, both in the narrow sense (the General Election of 1931, Baldwin succeeding Ramsay MacDonald in June, 1935, Labour Party conferences) and in the wider one (economic affairs, going off the gold standard, the rise of Fascism). Even the admirers of Virginia Woolf are too ready to concede to those who dislike her (those whom she called "Bloomsbury batters", for example), that her interest in public affairs was abnormally small, or somehow not authentic. Her entries for the autumn of 1931, to choose a difficult example, reflect as much awareness of the abandonment of the gold standard as we could expect of a contemporary novelist-diarist with respect to monetarism, say. Misleading things have been said recently, in the press and on the radio, claiming that Virginia Woolf was nearly oblivious to the political atmosphere of her own times. Of course, it is not surprising that her husband, who was political to his finger-tips, should have said in *Downhill All the Way* that "she was the least political animal that I ever lived since" Aristotle invented the definition, for that was by comparison with his own attitudes. But it is a little strange that the editors of Virginia Woolf's letters should endorse that view, for I think it is not supported by these diaries, to which they had access.

The diaries are so dense, and written with such evident speed, that they often give the impression of being only shorthand for the full expression of the thought they contain. In many cases in which conversation is being recorded, it is not easy to tell who is the speaker; and often it is only a discreet intervention by the editor that makes identification of the interlocutors possible.

There are those who have praised the literary quality of the diaries, sometimes in order to disparage by contrast Mrs Woolf's published work. It has even been claimed that the novels are too polished and lack the freshness of the diaries. But the real merit of these diaries is extra-literary.

They give the pleasure we get from gossip and from history. The reader who dislikes Virginia Woolf for snobishness will find grounds for her feelings in this volume, of an order that would have astonished even Wyndham Lewis - as when she records categorically that her husband is not a gentleman, and his brothers aren't either (June 25, 1935). But this must be balanced against another surprise in the book, which is the extent and frequency of her dealings with the Woolf family. With old Mrs Woolf, Leonard's mother, and with her sisters, brothers, nieces and nephews, Virginia exchanged the visits that would have been expected at the time of any member of a large and prosperous Jewish family.

Anyone who has ever been foolish enough seriously to accuse Virginia Woolf of antisemitism ought to look at the records of those visits, and at the passage where she comments on Leonard's feelings at the time of the publication of *After the Deluge*. He despaired because the reviewer in the *TLS* "only gave half a column of belittlement" to his book. Leonard Woolf was sure that the result of this damnation at insufficient length would be that librarians would balk at paying 15s for it. "Its curious pessimistic temper," his wife recorded in her diary, "something deeper than reason, struggling, many collies, that one can deal with. Influenza has exactly the same effect, liberating the irrational despondency which I see in all Woolves, and connect with centuries of oppression." It is evident from passages such as this one that Virginia Woolf understood and had sympathy for this particularly Jewish sort of gloom.

But the deepest pleasures to be got from this brilliantly edited volume are those of closer acquaintance with Virginia Woolf's everyday life. For example, her thrilled acceptance of the luxuries her increasing royalties bought, such as their new Lancaster motor car, or her marvelling at the uncomfortable bathroom arrangements which T. S. Eliot tolerated when he lodged at the Rectory of St Stephen's, Kensington, where "he shares a bath with curates". The picture that emerges is neither of an aesthete nor of an ascetic, but of a more rounded human being than we might suspect possible of a person who has an entire academic newsletter devoted to her.

slightly uneasy stance on the question of inspiration. Asked about whether his note-taking was almost accidental, B. S. Johnson replied "They do occur unexpectedly... They're what Joyce calls 'epiphanies', sudden moments when you realise there's something worth writing down. It's a common experience. I'm pretending I'm not unique." Many of the subjects speak of rhythms, phrases or images as the starting-points of their fiction, but show a very articulate awareness of the movement from germ to story. Burns divides these components into feminine and masculine when questioning John Gardner, who complains perceptively that Stanley Elkin and Thomas Pynchon are both excessively masculine, "all making" and "insists... that 'when you're working... part of you has to sit back

and read it over like a sympathetic reader and see if it's true, if it's lovable, if it's moving." Alan Sillitoe distinguishes between these two selves as poet and novelist, saying "You almost wait for poems. You can't wait for a novel, you have to be active. But for poems you have to be struck or put onto the tracks, as it were." However, he admits to feeling even as a novelist: "helped... by something I don't know about." "Pretending I'm not unique" is a commonplace among these widely divergent figures.

It is often said that shyness is the projection of arrogance. When these interviews are considered formally, the platitude becomes compelling, because behind the ostensible diffidence lies in each case substantial self-confidence. This is most clearly seen when John Hawkes, "Ishmael

Reed and Grace Paley address audiences at the University of Minnesota. In the more private, British format, J. G. Ballard tells Burns that the writer is "in the arena of the lion's terms". The American writer lurches between lion and stampee and stampee; Hawkes, Reed and Paley talk for pages, barely touching at the gods of questions. Where Burns expects to become a more truly self-effacing Michael Parkinson nudging his interlocutors gently towards the guided monologue, the American writer loose in academic effaces his questioners altogether. This is particularly noticeable with Grace Paley, who presents a more vibrant, dynamic and quiet persona than her distinctively noisy prose leads one to expect, and with Ishmael Reed, whose audience-type is his companion of his use of Woodcock to the WASP use of Olympus without making the distinct difference of cultural continuity he tramples over. The American writer participates in a shamanistic rite, the British admits us gingerly to his house.

In a different form, then, the Anglo-American divide this book intends to bridge reappears, but, importantly, not as the difference in methods and intentions which is often proclaimed. The interviews appear to be offered specifically to young writers, that they may learn some of the secrets of the craft; I doubt whether knowing that Alan Sillitoe appears only half-conscious of the state of his garden will really wake the muse, but these interviews do offer interestingly diverse and usually intelligent perspectives on what Alan Burns calls "the grand art form of our century, so vital, so fecund, so eloquent, so commensurate."

Michael Hofmann

Breeding, suffering, determining

S. J. Newman

PAULA MILNE

John David
195pp. Virago. £6.95 (paperback,
22.95).
0 85568 236 6

Like humans, mongrels are superfluous freaks of nature. They involuntarily inflict terrible pain on, and require superhuman strength to control, their parents. They are separated from normal humans by a minute genetic fracture - sufficient to remind us that we are normal and they are not, but insufficient to prevent their spoiled faces haunting us like the neanderthals in *The Inheritors*. Therefore, by and large, isn't it better for all concerned that they should be allowed to die as soon as possible?

That is the essential premise of *John David*, which arrives bedecked with a bouquet of plastic flowers from Fay

Weldon ("the bleak ineptness of reality threaded through with a thousand glittering skeins of relief"). And the promise that it will soon be a Major TV Play. No-one could begrudge Paula Milne her attempt to make literary capital from a lived disaster, or her desire not to treat one of life's sickest jokes as a sick joke, or her determination to stick to what she calls her "stubbornly average" approach against all the promptings of the medical and sociological professions. But that phrase "stubbornly average" sounds alarm. A parent of a mongrel who reads the book said, "one of the things that happened to all such parents I know is that this experience makes you confront yourself - your capacities, fears, the extent of your dependence on other people's reactions, your whole sense of values and priorities. Nobody in *John David* does this."

Unless, of course, the novel itself counts as self-confrontation. But it seemed to me like a ruthless attempt by the writer to coerce herself and the

reader into accepting as average what is inhuman. Not that the basic premise is itself inhuman - or at any rate abnormal. Judith in this novel feels, like Dennis in *How Far Can You Go?*: murderous. The difference between Lodge's treatment and Milne's is that Dennis's feelings are wayward, theatrical and suddenly tender. Judith's are unrelenting. From the birth to the cremation when at last she admits that "she and the baby had been locked in a combat to survive, and that she has won." (Readers may be haunted by the ghost of Mary Postgate.) But Dennis is a man; Judith is - or wants to be - Woman; every page proclaims "I breed, suffer and determine". Suffer she does, with impressive physicality; the best writing in the novel comes when she prostrates herself before the reader as lumps of hurt body. But like his child he deserves a kinder matrix. Feminists suffer fools even less gladly than they do mongrels - perhaps because foolish men turn women into feminists.

That this is a feminist tract masquerading as a novel, and that the essential issue is a mother's vanity, not a child's life.

That's probably an unfair judgment. But what made this reader hopping mad during his journey through Judith's semi-detached mental landscape was the sense that it was to protect this banality that some unknown mode of being was sacrificed. That's unfair too. Bits of Paula Milne are genuinely receptive to life. With more wit and imagination Judith's accidental husband could have been a comic hero. Perhaps a rotten husband, possibly a passable father - if he'd had the gumption to insist on the child being allowed to live. There's a visionary moment (which television will have problems in translating) when he catches his knees on the grusted residue of a wet dream while sliding out of a sleeping bag. But like his child he deserves a kinder matrix. Feminists suffer fools even less gladly than they do mongrels - perhaps because foolish men turn women into feminists.

Taking off

Savkar Altinel

ARTHUR YOUNG

The Surgeon's Knot
280pp. Collins. £7.95.
0 00 222061 X

Nell Aitken, the hero of *The Surgeon's Knot*, is Senior Registrar in a Glasgow hospital. His days are spent in performing miracles in the operating theatre, paying regular visits to his elderly parents, meditating on the complex fate of being Scottish and dreaming of his forthcoming emigration to America. When he saves the life of a would-be suicide from a prominent local family, he is taken aside by his immediate superior and told that he is a brilliant surgeon and should not think of proscribing himself. Neil admits that, yes, he is brilliant, but, as far as he is concerned, he is still going to America.

Then Nella, the teenage daughter of the woman he has saved, falls in love with him. Is there any chance of her feelings being reciprocated? She asks. No, he replies, he is afraid of love, and, in any case, he is going to America. When his father dies suddenly, however, he decides that a man is entitled to some comfort and gives Nella a call. The two of them return to her flat for a couple of weeks of love-making. She turns out to be a virgin, which flatters him, but when shortly before the end of the first week her mother unexpectedly shows up, he is bit disconcerted. Mother, though, says it is OK: she can't think of anyone she would rather have had her daughter deflowered by, and couldn't he and the girl perhaps get married? His answer to this is simple: thanks, but the fact is he is going to America.

The big day finally comes and our man boards his plane at Freetwick. He settles down, fastens his seat-belt, makes sure the back of his seat is in an upright position, hears the pilot announce that there will be a delay owing to a problem with a door lock, and starts waiting. Unfortunately, being a novice at the emigration game, he has made the fatal mistake of choosing the side of the aircraft facing the terminal buildings, and this causes him to spot his mother and Nella who, unknown to him and to each other, have come to the airport to try and catch a last glimpse of their truant. He groans, swears, argues with himself, and then stands up and, pausing only to chuck an alarmed stewardess under the chin and say: "Honey don't fret", walks out through the defective door and down the steps to go out and face love, assume responsibility, and possibly even force the uncreated conscience of his race.

Arthur Young writes in a curious style, the main elements of which are a disregard for grammar ("There is an eerie time comes to all surgeons when a patient dies on him"), an unflinching instinct for the most inapposite word in any given context ("... a guy whose car had fallen off its jack on to his tum-tum"), a penchant for bombast ("... the aesthetics of pain dimmed only by laudanum"), alliteration ("The blind leading the blind was one thing, but the blotto opening the druggo with a Swann-Morton knife was quite another guggle from the grog bottle"), malapropisms ("caravanisation", "caravans", "lighted for 'ditted"), and mixed metaphors ("He was passing the buck like a potato off the hob").

Despite all this, there are a few surprisingly acute insights. What Neil says on the subject of self-hugging Scottish parochialism, for instance, should be read out at every Burns Supper.

I had the fear of drowning in the lake. Nostalgia. What's like? The gut-grawling certainty that if I didn't get out from under I would catch the parish pump before the process becomes irreversible. The one thing to be very thankful for was that I was not too much of a fish. I had a good life, and I was not too much of a fish. I had a good life, and I was not too much of a fish.

Such passages, though, are rare.

Diplomacy and disaster

Robin Seager

DONALD KAGAN

The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition
393pp. Cornell University Press.
£19.25.
0 8014 1367 2

In this, the third and best volume of his history of the Peloponnesian War, written, like its predecessors, with a somewhat un-American lightness and lucidity of style, Donald Kagan deals with two very different phases of the struggle and two very different sections of Thucydides' narrative, linked by the conflicting personalities of Nicias and Alcibiades. Thucydides' account of the "uneasy peace" is harsh even by his standards and uncharacteristically unfinished, while his story of the Sicilian expedition is an elaborate masterpiece of sustained and careful composition. In coping with both, Kagan holds to the sound principle of accepting Thucydides as the essential framework of any modern reconstruction while allowing due weight to other testimony where it occurs. It is also a comfort that in his treatment of the Peace of Nicias he has moderated considerably some of his earlier positions on the workings of social and economic factors in the

various cities, and is more ready than before to accept that opposing individuals and groups might pursue the same end for different reasons.

Kagan's most striking contribution in a generally sound discussion of the dissonant felt with the peace by Sparta's allies is the suggestion that the Boeotians were afraid of Athens, now that Sparta would be too preoccupied with trouble in the Peloponnese to keep her old enemy in check. This is possible, yet it is hard to see what cause Boeotia might have to fear Athens or to feel that she might need Spartan aid in warding off any threat that Athens might present. More important problems quickly supervene; why did Athens grant the Spartan request for an alliance and return the Spartan prisoners, and what were the Corinthians aiming at in stirring up discord in the Peloponnese? Kagan's answer to the first question is to ascribe to Nicias a "Cimonian" policy, whereby Athens and Sparta would rule the rest of Greece in amity. This policy he then condemns as foolish and impractical; accepting that Athens was too war-weary to pursue a "Themistoclean" line of active hostility to Sparta on her own ground, he suggests with some plausibility that her best course would have been to reject Sparta's plea without going so far as to join Argos. There is, however, hardly any need to assume anything so positive as a "Cimonian" policy; a desire on the part of adherents of the

peace on both sides to scare Argos into inactivity by an alliance that both generals. At Mantinea Agis deliberately allowed potential oligarchs in the Argive army to escape, and the terms of the alliance between Sparta and Argos make it clear, as Kagan should have noted, that the Spartans knew that an oligarchic revolution at Argos was imminent. Mantinea left Sparta secure in the Peloponnese, despite her failure to maintain the Argive oligarchy and the continuing resentment of Corinth. Meanwhile Athens, with her policy crisis left unresolved when neither Nicias nor Alcibiades fell victim to ostracism, savagely vented her frustrations on Melos.

On two important points at the outset of the Sicilian expedition Kagan is probably right in taking Thucydides to task. The Athenians cannot have been as ignorant of Sicilian geography and politics as the historian makes out, while the size of the force originally proposed gives the lie to the claim that Athens' aim was to subdue the whole island. Nicias' amendment was the blueprint for disaster; the forces were still not suitable for their task (Kagan rightly highlights the failure to ask for cavalry at this stage), but they were now so large that failure would be far more serious. Kagan also seems right in asserting that Alcibiades' recall to stand trial in the affairs of the Mysteries and the Hermae (on which he is perhaps too ready to believe

rather than mere incompetence, on the part of the Argive generals. At Mantinea Agis deliberately allowed potential oligarchs in the Argive army to escape, and the terms of the alliance between Sparta and Argos make it clear, as Kagan should have noted, that the Spartans knew that an oligarchic revolution at Argos was imminent.

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Andocides) did little to prejudice the expedition's chance of success. The increase in its size, which made it appear a greater threat to the peoples of Sicily, rendered Alcibiades' plan of a diplomatic offensive less likely to bear fruit, and it had had time to fail under his leadership before his arrest.

Once a prolonged war was in prospect, the Athenian lack of cavalry was bound to create difficulties, but Nicias' record displays a sorry string of errors: his failure to fortify the approaches to Epitropae, the carelessness which let Gylippus reach Sicily, and the waste of time on a double wall in the south while the north wall remained unfinished all baffle explanation. In the final stages, as the expedition moved from defeat to destruction, Kagan remains strongly critical of Nicias, and rightly so: the newly arrived Democleides was capable of an accurate analysis of the choices still left to the Athenians, and once the desperate gamble to the attack on Epitropae had failed, a rapid withdrawal while there was still time was the only rational course. In conclusion he addresses the problem of the contradiction which undoubtedly exists between Thucydides' facts and his interpretation of them. Inevitably problems remain, but Kagan's book will be welcomed by students and their teachers. It deals with matters of central importance, it is sensible and it is easy and pleasant to read: all virtues which rank increasingly as endangered species.

Instability the rule

Peter Lewis

STUART EVANS

Temporary Hearths
419pp. Hutchinson. £9.95.
0 09 146750 0

Apart from the tetralogy A. S. Byatt launched with *The Virgin in the Garden*, Stuart Evans' *Whodunnit Hill* sequence of five novels is probably the most ambitious fictional work in progress by a British writer. *Temporary Hearths* is the third and central book in Evans' planned quintet and is itself an intricate, varied, and demanding work. Evans is often labelled as a novelist of ideas, which may make him sound formidably cerebral; but although his political and intellectual interests pervade *Temporary Hearths*, as they do his previous novels, it would be wrong to think of him as a writer who employs fiction primarily as a way of sugarcoating the pill of a "message". He has always been interested in problems of structure and narrative method, and *Temporary Hearths* again reveals him as a formally adventurous and innovative writer, though not an ostentatiously experimental or avant-garde one.

Temporary Hearths may be viewed as a "condition of Britain" novel - not "condition of England" despite the London setting, because Evans' Welshness is evident in the prominence he gives to several characters belonging to the London Welsh community. Following on from its predecessors, *Centres of Rhinoceros* and *Occupational Debris*, and carrying frequent reminders of them, *Temporary Hearths* traces the lives and relationships of a host of characters from just before the General Election in 1979 through the early part of Mrs Thatcher's administration. Of the three generations spanned in this novel, Evans concentrates on three members of the older generation, Cecil Hanover, Jack Maddox, and Paul Hampden, all of whom are themselves engaged in writing works of fiction. The families and friends of these three men are woven together in a complex network so that the lives of a large yet seemingly unconnected group of people belonging mainly to London, Wiltshire, and the Welsh valleys, rub against each other. The influence of Iris Murdoch can be detected in the way in which Evans orchestrates the shifting relations and sexual pairings of many of the characters. Sex plays an important part in the lives of a number of them; whether young middle-aged or elderly, but Evans' unobtrusive restraint from the routine explicitness of, for example, Scobie's characters, especially the women, among physical pleasures.

The instability of personal and sexual relationships throughout the novel is symptomatic of other uncertainties, social, political and moral. Hence the title, with its stress

on "temporary". The emotional mobility of the characters, their rapid changes of partners and "hearts", reveals a society in crisis, lacking a clear sense of direction or purpose and a coherent scheme of values. The crisis also proves to be that of the liberal conscience in a world which constantly undermines its pretensions, however worthy. The elderly men associated with Cecil Hanover and given prominent parts under light disguises in his autobiographical novel about the 1930s, *Waiting for the Lord*, look back to that decade as a time when their middle-class socialist or even communist faith was strong, and when both optimism and certainty were not only possible but almost mandatory. From the perspective of 1980, everything looks different: some of them remain politically active but have difficulty in comprehending the upheavals that have overtaken them in the more recent past.

Different as the Welsh intellectual Jack Maddox is from Hanover's circle of friends, he has added more than most to the heap of broken marriages in the novel, and has suffered a more

searing alienation from his early left-wing ideals. Maddox is a deeply divided man who finds himself taking on the mantle of that caustic of conservatives, Juvenal, and his fictional *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* is full of short quotations from the great Roman satirist; it also adapts Juvenal's lash to the modern world. Many of the characters in *Temporary Hearths*, especially those from the media, journalism, the civil service, and business, seem to merit little more than his contempt - they are Hobbesian creatures motivated largely by self-interest and self-aggrandisement.

To maintain our interest in the many characters, Evans evolves a complex arrangement of intercutting and jumping forward in time, so that the narrative rarely stays on one figure for long. The novel is formally and technically ingenious, even though much of it takes the form of an orthodox third-person narrative. It opens and ends with, and is punctuated by, the interior monologue of an unnamed political leader who is the victim of a terrorist kidnapping. This framing device has no narrative connection with the rest of the novel.

Temporary Hearths is an accomplished novel, but for all its diversity and range it does not deliver as much as its pivotal place in the sequence might promise. Perhaps there is too much diversity, too much of a social panorama, as Evans shuttles from character to character without driving very deeply into any of them except for Maddox, the protagonist. The two remaining books in the sequence may alter our views of *Temporary Hearths* as it will modify our verdicts on its two predecessors.

Criminal proceedings

T. J. Binyon

JULIAN SYMONS

The Delling Murders
224pp. Macmillan. £5.95.
0 333 31305 4

Julian Symons' new novel is set in the 1890s. Bernard Ross, an up-and-coming Liberal MP with a mysterious background and possible Fenian connections, wooes and wins Dolly Delling, despite the angry opposition of her father, Sir Arthur Delling. Dolly's sister Neilly, a girl of advanced and Bohemian tastes, falls in love with an impecunious art student. Their brother, Roderick, is married to the daughter of a rich financier, works at the Home Office, and is addicted to gambling. A scandalous trial is found in his studio off Tottenham Court Road. Bernard's address is in his pocket. Over Christmas another death occurs in the Delling country house in Kent. *The Delling Murders* is an immaculately executed, with its economical, yet utterly convincing use of period detail, as Julian Symons's two previous Victorian crime stories, *The Blackheath Poisonings* and *Street Alibi*. It does, however, lack the gloomy, brooding, claustrophobic family atmosphere of those two novels, and the tension is perhaps therefore slightly less. It's a much more open-ended piece of work, almost a Victorian thriller, with its enough personages and plot, to have been developed, as volume of *Trollope* dimensions. And it's not the time-travelling crime very much to mind.

Bernard Ross is younger brother to Ferdinand Lopez of *Can You Forgive Her?*; the novel's financial jiggery-pokery has echoes of Melmotte's schemes in *The Way We Live Now*. All in all, a masterful performance.

PETER LOVESEY

The False Inspector Dew
251pp. Macmillan. £6.95.
0 333 32748 9

On board the Mauretania as it steams out of Southampton Water in the first week of September, 1921, is a glitteringly cosmopolitan array of passengers. Among them, fleeing a tyrannical wife, is an adulterous dentist who, for a joke, has taken as an alias the name of the detective who tracked down Crippen. Walter Dew, So, when a crime occurs on board he is naturally inclined to lead the investigation. The novel is beautifully set in 1920s costume with just the right amount of period detail. And slightly asyatic in effect: in moving from Victorian England to the age of the flapper, Peter Lovesey has left behind his detective, Sergeant Cribb, and hasn't created any similarly strong character to replace him.

MICHAEL GILBERT

Mr Calder and Mr Behrens
250pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £6.95.
0 340 24735 2

Mr Calder (6-1913) and Mr Behrens (6-1910), active in intelligence during

the war, have been more loosely connected with it since. Michael Gilbert has been writing stories about them, and Mr Calder's Persian deerhound, Rasselas, for some time. An earlier collection, *Come Without Ruler*, the present book contains twelve stories written between 1967 and the present. All are neatly plotted and sharply narrated. And if, at times, Mr Calder and Mr Behrens seem slightly unreal in the crisp efficiency with which they deal with his situation, the impression is counterbalanced by a very realistic and unblinkered view of some of the nastier sides of life.

ED MCBAIN

Beauty and the Beast

192pp. Macmillan. £7.95.
0 333 30769 3

This is Ed McBain's third novel with a fairy-tale title and Florida attorney Matthew Hope as its hero. In it Hope defends a Negro junk man, George Harper, who is accused of having beaten up, and then murdered his beautiful German-French wife Michelle. Ed McBain couldn't write a boring book if he tried all the time, too much Florida softens the brain; and McBain ought to be just back to the 87th Precinct before the process becomes irreversible. The one thing to be very thankful for is that the novel is not too much of a fish. I had a good life, and I was not too much of a fish. I had a good life, and I was not too much of a fish.

Slogans in silver

Michael Grant

R. A. G. CARSON

Principal Coins of the Romans:
Volume 3: The Dominate, AD 294-498
112pp. British Museum Publications.
£20.
0 7141 0853 7

This is the third and last part of a general survey of Roman coins (gold, silver and bronze) by the Keeper of Coins and Medals at the British Museum, following volumes on the Republic and Principate. R. A. G. Carson presents a judicious selection of these pieces - numbering 1,665 in the present volume - and gives details of their denominations, weights, inscriptions and designs (or legends and types, as numismatists like to say), accompanied by brief but cogent explanatory observations. The accounts are arranged within chronological groups, which are introduced by notes offering some historical background.

The dates beginning and ending this volume have been chosen for numismatic reasons: the year 294 marks a far-reaching reform of the currency by Diocletian and Maximian, while it was in 498 that Anastasius I introduced the equally comprehensive reforms that were to provide the system of coinage adopted by the Byzantine regime.

From a historical point of view, too, these dates correspond roughly with two decisive changes. For Diocletian was the emperor who against every likelihood based on historical "inevitability", revived the apparently dying Roman empire - at the grim cost of imposing the early stages of a far tougher and more authoritarian rule ("the Dominate") than its people had ever had to endure hitherto. And Anastasius I (491-518) was the first to succeed to the imperial throne after the division between an eastern and a western empire (which had lasted, with only a brief interruption, for more than a century) came to an end, and when the western empire, distributed among too many principalities, ceased to exist. Traditionally, this occurred in 476, when Romulus Augustulus was forced to abdicate: a convenient milestone, although (as Carson points out) the western "ruler" Julius Nepos, resident in Dalmatia, continued to be nominally recognized in Italy for another four years.

Meanwhile, other potent events had occurred in the course of the intervening two hundred years.

Outstanding among these was the double achievement of Constantine the Great (306-337): the foundation of Constantinople - successor of ancient Greek Byzantium - which was to dwarf all the other cities of Europe, without exception, throughout almost the entire duration of the Middle Ages that followed; and the recognition and establishment of Christianity, in circumstances which, although continually being providence as still (in some ways) surprising and not very easily understood. The gradual extension of Christian symbolism on to Roman coins is a particularly fascinating aspect of them; though naturally the most important Christian thinkers of this age - when the majority of clever people were Christian: Augustine, Jerome and the rest - find no representation, however indirect. Nor, for that matter, do the major political and military happenings of the age, notably the series of wars and battles which brought German domination of the west inexorably nearer.

This is one great difference between the coins of this late Roman epoch and their extraordinarily informative forerunners during the three previous centuries of the Empire. Instead, the inscriptions on coins of this new age mostly enunciate general truths - or rather the canons of Milan and Ravenna (the successive western capitals), and of their eastern counterpart at Constantinople, wished the people to regard as truths; and there are also outpourings of theoretical aspirations, and a mass of complimentary references to imperial anniversaries and celebrations. All these kinds of allusions had appeared before; but now such generalities often monopolize the coins. This makes the successive issues harder both to read and to interpret. True, mint-marks are and is a great help, but in most other respects the numismatic task is more difficult (even more difficult) than for earlier periods. Yet it remains equally essential for historians.

We are indebted to numismatics for the names and political programmes of a considerable number of short-lived emperors who are otherwise virtually unknown, but whose portraits, together with those of recognized emperors, empresses and princes, duly make an appearance. Here again, at first sight, we are less well off than we were before, since the high degree of realism achieved by earlier imperial portraiture has been abandoned in favour of far more impersonal, hieratic

and abstract styles. However, there is a very real, or at least potential, compensation, since these heads (not to speak of the designs on the reverse) provide an extensive opportunity for a study of the beginnings of Byzantine art - an opportunity which, so far as the coinage is concerned, has not yet been adequately grasped.

But the main importance of these coins to the Roman historian lies in the slogans which the emperors' advisers chose to display on them: "To the Genius of the Roman People" (victoriae), "The Roman People, Unconquered Conqueror" (just before, and even during, the adoption of Christianity), "The People's Hero" (*Spes Publica*) and later (once) *Salus Mundi* (accompanied by "Christian symbols"), "Blessed Tranquillity" (a forlorn hope, this). "The Joy of the Roman People". Another proud assertion proclaims the emperor "Triumphant over Barbarian Peoples" - not that military successes of this kind, or even the possibility of claiming them, prevailed for long.

Nevertheless, as the western empire gradually collapsed, its government, like that of its more viable eastern partner and rival, continued to use the coinage as propaganda, though it became less varied in the later stages. Augustus, whose foundation of the Principate, hundreds of years earlier, had unleashed this torrent, must have been told by his advisers - that people looked at the coins and read what was written on them. And so probably, lacking much else to read, they did. But toward the end, with the western frontiers crumbling on all sides and a grossly oppressive taxation system which wonders if it was still the case. Or perhaps they still read the declarations on the coins, but when (as Carson relates) they saw the Gothic puppet Priscus Aetius halting "Unconquerable Eternal Rome" or the even more obscure Burgundians and Alan nomads Jovinus defining himself as the "Restorer" of the historic Republic, they surely laughed.

Robert Carson and the British Museum deserve great credit for illuminating such an extraordinary period, and for bringing this series of volumes to a successful conclusion.

Oxford Classical Texts have been added to by the publication of *Euripides Fabulae* Volume II, edited by J. Diggle (373pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £6.25: 0 19 814590 X). James Diggle is a Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge. The plays of Euripides here included are *Suppliants*, *Electra*, *Hecuba*, *Trachiniae*, *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Ion*.

Under occupation

D. J. Breeze

P. A. HOLDER

The Roman Army in Britain
173pp. Batsford. £9.95.
0 7144 3629 6

It is perhaps strange, in view of the interest in Roman Britain, that there has so far been no full-length treatment of the Roman army in Britain. P. A. Holder's book does not qualify as such for it contains less than 100 pages, though it is supported by a thirty-page appendix on the garrison of Britain, and a further thirty-pages of references, notes, tables, glossary, bibliography and indexes.

The preface states that aim of this book is to

bring together the evidence for the units, officers and men of the Roman army in Britain, which formed the garrison of Britain during the occupation of the province. The approach is analytical, rather than descriptive, had not been attempted before. It means there is no integrated account of imperial policy towards Britain and the resulting patterns of occupation and frontier works. Instead this material has been used to construct a portrait of the army as a body of men and discover what was expected of it in peace and war.

Thus Dr Holder concentrates on the organization of the army, treating the units, their officers and men, together with their recruitment and conditions of service. Chapters follow on the army on campaign, peacetime routine and the fourth-century army. The balance of the book reflects Holder's doctoral thesis on the auxiliary. In these areas he is most confident. Sufficiently confident, for example, to ignore conventional interpretations without comment. In spite of the apparatus of endnotes, yet, apart from a few asynchronic misstatements, mistakes do occur, while internal inconsistencies and infidelities of grammar are not infrequent.

Perhaps this book is not as disappointing for what it does not include. There is no discussion of one important activity of the army: "what was expected of it in war". Accounts survive of several British battles, as well as others fought on the continent by British troops. Yet not one is described. Tacitus, too, in his *Life of*

Agricola, provides a fine picture of the army on campaign, yet this is not drawn upon by Holder in his account of that subject, for he is solely concerned with the narrow evidence of camps. And once the enemy was defeated (as he always was in Britain) how was he controlled? What were the army's tactics in both peacetime and during the empire's new subjects? What were the demands created by the presence of the army, and how were they met? The answers to these questions, and many others which might be thought pertinent to a study of the Roman army in Britain, will not be found here.

The uneven treatment extends to the illustrations. The photographs seem to be chosen more for availability than relevance: there is, without explanation, an aerial photograph of a partially excavated Roman fort. There are too many photographs of inscriptions and cropmark sites, to the exclusion of outstanding remains. (Housesteads in the fourth century is the only example.) The coverage in no way reflects one of the strengths of Roman military studies in Britain: the wealth of surviving relics of Rome's former presence in the form of forts and frontiers. The emphasis in the line-drawings is on fort plans. It would have been helpful to place these in their wider setting through the provision of at least one distribution map - more of which would have reflected the changing pattern of military forces, though this is, avowedly, beyond the author's scope. The legibility of the drawings has not been helped by the coarse paper that has been used.

Wall-Painting in Roman Britain by Norman Davey and Roger Ling (230pp. with 123 illustrations including 13 colour plates: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 31 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PP. Paperback £14.50). Is Number 3 in the Britannia Monograph Series edited by S. S. Frere. The introduction discusses the dating, styles and patterns, subjects and motifs, social implications and organization of work, plastering and painting techniques and methods of recovery and restoration of the wall-paintings at various places in Britain with a key to the sites mentioned in the text. A catalogue of the surviving material lists fifty-three items with measurements and detailed descriptions. There is an appendix cataloguing twelve decorations known from old photographs and drawings and a list of pigment identifications by Leo Blek. The volume contains a microfilm with fifty additional colour illustrations.